U.S. MILITARY CAREER TRANSITION:

AN EXPLORATORY INTERVIEW STUDY OF THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

OF ENLISTED MILITARY PERSONNEL TRANSITIONING FROM

ACTIVE DUTY TO THE CIVILIAN WORKFORCE

by

Nicole Barbara Morant

Dissertation Committee:

Professor Lyle Yorks, Sponsor
Professor Marie Volpe

Approved by the Committee on the Degree of Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

U.S. MILITARY CAREER TRANSITION: AN EXPLORATORY INTERVIEW STUDY OF THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF ENLISTED MILITARY PERSONNEL TRANSITIONING FROM ACTIVE DUTY TO THE CIVILIAN WORKFORCE

Nicole Barbara Morant

Increases in the number of enlisted veterans transitioning from active duty to the civilian world have drawn attention to a need for research in terms of unemployment to examine how separated service members experience transition from their perspective. Fifteen separated enlisted veterans from four of the five military branches were selected and interviewed in this study. The focus was to understand better the complexities of reintegrating into the civilian workforce, as experienced by veterans from the enlisted military population.

By using qualitative methodologies including exploratory interviews and a focus group, the findings revealed four major themes on how service members described their transition experience: (a) perception that military leadership does not provide adequate support when transitioning and the need to become more self-directed in one's own learning; (b) belief that the military TAP class is helpful but needs major changes to truly be effective; (c) description of a battle buddy or a family member as a positive influence

in helping with the transition process; and (d) experiencing significant challenges with civilian employers when transitioning out of the military.

An analysis of the findings led the researcher to conclude that transitioning veterans must become self-directed in their learning in order to transition successfully. Moreover, because they are at varying levels of being self-directed when they transition, additional guidance is needed from military leadership, family, and other veterans for the purpose of their development.

The analysis also yielded a principal recommendation for military leadership to advocate for quality training programs that are specified from the separated enlisted population for what resources they need to assist with transition to the civilian sector. Additional recommendations were presented to transitioning service members on the importance of managing their own success and believing in their abilities to be resilient, valuable members of the civilian community.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my Dad, who always believed I would be doing something extraordinary in this world and was there for me in every possible way a father could be for his little girl. God truly blessed me with a father who had sacrificed and loved me unconditionally. For that, I am forever grateful for the time we had on this earth together.

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First, I'd like to thank all of the participants for your candid feedback and for allowing me to interview you for this research. Your sacrifice and service to our country will always be revered. Please remember, there is always someone who is able and more than willing to help you with your transition.

I'd like to thank TC faculty, Dr. Marsick, Dr. Bitterman, Dr. Severson, and Dr. Alahdeff-Jones, for providing insightful classroom exercises and opportunities to learn through reflection; Dr. Maltbia, for providing a classroom environment that spoke to my style of learning and the importance of having F.R.I.D. (Frequency, Repetition, Intensity, and Duration) during this dissertation journey; Dr. Marie Volpe, whose experience and valuable feedback helped me in so many ways to complete this process. Last, but not least, my advisor, Dr. Yorks, who gave me the freedom to complete this process and was extremely patient with me at times when I wasn't motivated. I thank you for your guidance and wisdom and always having an encouraging tone.

My fellow cohort members, who all at one point in time inspired me to think outside of what my experiences and knowledge base allowed, I thank you all for challenging me intellectually and serving as mentors for me during this academic journey. Additionally, a special acknowledgment to Brian M. and Ashli R. for our years of texting about staying on track, our future goals, and the randomness of life experiences that we humorously shared with one another.

N. B. M.

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INTRODUCTION

Context and Background

U.S. active duty service members bear the responsibility of securing the nation's freedom while living in a military culture that is immensely different from the civilian world (Baruch & Quick, 2009). Currently, there are 1.3 million active duty service members in one of the five U.S. military branches who will soon become veterans and begin working in the civilian sector (Carter-Boyd, 2012). Moreover, because veterans are transitioning from one work culture to another, it may be inferred that a tremendous amount of learning is taking place as veterans shift their frames of mind to adjust to the civilian workforce (Baruch & Quick, 2009; Carter-Boyd, 2012; Merriam, 2001). Although it is common for veterans to utilize their previous experiences from the military in the civilian workforce, they are still embarking on a second career that will result in a new lifestyle and a new concept of self (Carter-Boyd, 2012; Vigoda-Gadot, Baruch & Grimland, 2010).

The U.S. military is comprised of five military branches including the Navy, Marines, Army, Air Force, and Coast Guard. All of the branches fall under the Department of Defense except the Coast Guard, which falls under the Department of Homeland Security (Carter-Boyd, 2012; Petrovich, 2012). However, during a time of

war, the Coast Guard is commanded by the Department of Defense (DOD) as needed to serve as additional manpower and expertise to protect the security of the nation (Petrovich, 2012). Within each branch is a subculture of both officers and enlisted members who have different acronyms, ranks, and structure. Officers are known as the supervisory leaders of the military branch and enlisted members are known as the technical managers, who regardless of years of service are often seen as inferior to officers.

"Officers and Enlisted service members have very different requirements, commitments, and responsibilities in the military" (Military.com, 2012). In addition, each branch has its own specific standards for both, but all have key benchmarks that need to be met prior to joining the military. To be a commissioned officer in one of the five military branches, service members must possess an undergraduate degree. Moreover, for officers to continue to be promoted to the next rank, a graduate degree is either preferred or even mandatory for some branches. By contrast, enlisted service members do not have a postsecondary requirement for entrance into the military, nor is obtaining an undergraduate degree a requirement for promotion to the next rank. Although rare in today's informational age, enlisted service members may enter the military without a high school diploma or the equivalent, with the risk of being denied some military educational benefits. Statistics from the Department of Labor (2015) found that "regardless of their period of service, unemployment rates in 2010 for veterans with higher levels of education were lower than for those with less education." Drawing from the consensus of the literature that military officers who retire have a history of challenges with transitioning to the civilian workforce, one may infer that enlisted

separated soldiers may have equal or additional challenges because they lack the educational and leadership experience (Diamond, 2012; Hoffeditz, 2006; Wolpert, 1989).

After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States, the country was put on high alert and military members were deployed to carry out the mission of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Since then, a key component of the military lifestyle has been continuous combat training that serves as readiness for multiple deployments, with limited opportunities for personal and professional development (Doyle & Peterson, 2005). On the contrary, many service members joined the military for its developmental opportunities, specifically their postsecondary education benefits and unique military career specialties (Clemens & Milsom, 2008; Diffenauer, 2010). The dilemma service members face during a time of war is they have a limited amount of time to attend postsecondary education and/or explore the different career options they would like to pursue. The limitations of professional development opportunities derive from the military's "mission first" mentality. With limited education and professional development opportunities, service members may separate from the military before they become retirement-eligible to pursue other endeavors. Furthermore, there are over one million active duty military members conceivably not content with their current career status and may be preparing to become a part of the larger community of the 22.7 million veterans who have transitioned to the civilian workforce (Carter-Boyd, 2012; Petrovich, 2012).

Research Problem

Although the economic crisis has improved significantly over the past 8 years, unemployment is still a cause of concern for many Americans. In a recent study completed by the Department of Veterans Affairs, one of two separating post-9/11 veterans were found to face a period of unemployment (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). This suggests a disconnect between veterans transitioning from the military to the civilian workforce. On the contrary, obtaining a new career in the civilian sector after the military is one of the top concerns for veterans (Clemens & Milsom, 2008; Silva, 2011). In today's world, the complexities of veterans transitioning to the civilian workforce have grown more challenging as they navigate societal, physical, and emotional constraints. The literature on military career transition has proposed different theories for the reasons why veterans struggle with reintegration into the civilian workforce. However, how they experience and learn during this process is rarely explored.

In the information age, military transition has become a popular topic, with civilians, small businesses, and Fortune 500 companies providing employment and other opportunities for veterans of the armed services. Despite the popularity and guarantee for some of these opportunities, there is still a multitude of high-profile challenges that plague veterans from reaching their full potential in civilian careers. One of the most notable is the educational disparity among veterans in the military. Officers typically have college degrees; however, the enlisted population makes up the bulk of each branch in the armed services and is not required to have a degree beyond a high school diploma. Military education statistics have noted that separated enlisted veterans without college degrees are the majority of the unemployed population (Silva, 2011). Clemens and

Milsom (2008) echoed these findings by reporting their data, which found only 4% of enlisted service members had 4-year college degrees. Considering the average age of a separated enlisted veteran is only 24, the data implied that enlisted service members who separated from the military before retiring are the population most challenged with reintegration into the civilian workforce.

In reviewing the current literature, the bulk of the information described the transition of retirees, specifically military officers' experience with career transition (Diffenauer, 2010; King, 2011). A military retiree's average age of retirement is 43, which indicates he or she would have more education, civilian networks, and life experience that would properly prepare him or her for a smoother transition (Silva, 2011; Yanos, 2004). The data also showed potential gaps in the literature because of the focus on one population of the military, resulting in a vast amount of research that has only addressed the challenges of military retirees and officers. Less was known about the career transition experiences of separated enlisted service members.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the learning experiences of enlisted veterans when they transition from the military to the civilian workforce. By exploring the learning experiences of their career transition, the objective was to better understand the complexities of civilian reintegration for separated enlisted service members. Wolpert (1989) believed there is a need for more education in today's civilian workforce for veteran employees to transition successfully. Understanding the military's culture and its fundamental differences in career transition for veterans as opposed to

civilians can provide additional clarity about the reasons for the higher unemployment rate (Diffenauer, 2010; King, 2011). Moreover, military leaders, civilian employers, and transition specialists can revise existing strategies and programs to meet the unique needs of veterans while also maximizing their individual skill sets. By utilizing an adult learning lens and exploring the lived experiences of veterans, the practical goal was to better understand and inform the military and civilian communities about the reintegration process.

Research Questions

The primary research question of this study was: How do separated enlisted service members experience career transition after leaving active duty and going into the civilian workforce?

Subquestions derived from the primary research question were:

1. How do veterans describe their transition from active duty to the civilian workforce?
2. What challenges do veterans experience during their transition from active duty to the civilian workforce?
3. What type of resources were utilized by veterans to assist with their transition to the civilian workforce?
4. What personal and professional influences do veterans describe as an advantage during the reintegration process?

Research Design Overview

In designing this research study on the exploration of how separated enlisted military personnel experience transition, the researcher utilized an exploratory format to gather qualitative data. This research employed exploratory interviews as a methodology because of their "empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context; especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (Yin, 2014, p. 16). Military veterans with a deployment history after September 11, 2001 who never retired were more likely to fit the selection criteria and have once been a part of the unemployed veteran's community. A sample size of 15 veterans was selected from purposeful sampling because of their abilities to provide understanding and first-hand knowledge for the problem statement and research questions. In essence, this was an exploratory study that detailed the accounts of each veteran and focused on antecedents, contextual factors, perceptions, and attitudes preceding a transition from active duty to the civilian sector, with the purpose of exploring causes, determinants, factors, processes, experiences, and so on that contributed to the research problem (Robson, 2002).

The data used were compiled from a focus group and interviews, with some requiring follow-up questioning. Although the focus group was not a part of the study, it confirmed and provided supplemental data given in the individual interviews. The literature review on experiential and self-directed learning was the lens through which the data collected were viewed, in addition to the framework of transition theory and the military career transition process as a whole.

Rationale and Significance

Military educators, potential employers, and veterans can benefit from this research by understanding the lived challenges and obstacles veterans face as they transition from active duty service to the civilian work sector. In understanding how veterans learn, educators and future employers are more cognizant of how to address the needs of veterans while also maximizing their potential for what they categorize as a successful transition. For example, civilian employers can add transition programs to their Human Resources model that provides training or adaptation resources for recently hired veterans. This may be especially helpful for companies who are affiliated with veteran education or career programs that are common for military transition, including law enforcement, education, and business.

Department of Veterans affairs and the five military branches can introduce or update their current reintegration programs with more informed, modernized research. Specifically, this research can be utilized to open the dialogue about including veterans of junior enlisted ranks in the discussion within active duty branches about the career preparation needs for a successful transition. According to the current literature, the majority of military transition assistance programs are influenced by civilians, active duty officers, and retired officers in that the experiences of separated enlisted service members may not be acknowledged and fully addressed in the current programs (Baruch & Quick, 2009; Sharkey, 2011). The results of this research will contribute to the body of knowledge on military education and career transition for veterans. The overall research design was intended to provide practical understanding to veterans as they transition to the civilian work sector. Furthermore, veterans who are experiencing similar encounters

during transition can identify with the findings of this research and potentially find alternatives or solutions to their personal challenges with reintegration.

Assumptions

The primary assumption of this research was that the participating military veterans would discuss all of their experiences of transition with the researcher, explicitly involving the triumphs and failures of their active duty to civilian career transition periods. Veterans may have encountered an array of obstacles during the transition which they may not feel comfortable speaking about; however, the researcher presumed that her military counseling background would provide the necessary levels of comfort for a rich dialogue. The researcher also acknowledged that some of the military experiences that informed their reintegration into the civilian work sector might be a result of a classified and/or restricted military event they are unable to share. Furthermore, this research utilized pseudonyms and omitted any personally identifiable information to protect the service members' identity and any sensitive data they provided.

Other relevant assumptions based on the study design were:

1. All veterans experience challenges with career transition and reintegration in the civilian world/workforce.
2. Veterans experience some form of learning during their career transition.
3. Veterans' career transition experience is influenced by their military background.
4. Civilian employers are often uninformed about the depths of work experience that veterans have from military and previous careers.

Researcher's Background

This study was designed by a military educator who brings her own viewpoint of the reintegration experience for military veterans from a counselor/advisor perspective. Having worked in the military education field for over 10 years assisting officers and enlisted service members in the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, and Coast Guard with their education and career transition goals, many of the researcher's biases come from lived experiences. She assumed that, generally, enlisted service members have the most challenges with career transition because they are viewed as not having as much education, management skills, or leadership attributes. Unbeknownst to the civilian world, most enlisted veterans have all of those attributes through experiential experience in the military but they are not documented (i.e., degrees, civilian training) in layman's terms for civilians to easily identify with (Clemens & Milsom, 2008). The researcher believes there is misinformation about the depth of the military career experience for enlisted veterans and its transferability to the civilian workforce.

In her experience, because veteran military officers typically have an undergraduate degree, they have a smoother transition. Civilian career connections to their military jobs are easier to articulate to potential civilian employers because their college degrees and officer evaluations are similar to corporate company leadership structures. Consequently, this resulted in her reasoning to focus primarily on the enlisted veteran population.

Definitions of Key Terms

The U.S. military is a culture that is considered rich in traditions, customs, and a language that is very forthright (Petrovich, 2012). Many common military terminologies are so unfamiliar to civilians that most researchers have a specific section in their studies devoted to defining the meaning of acronyms for civilian audiences (Fleming, 2008; Petrovich, 2012). For this literature review, veteran and service member are synonymous in their meaning of a former Active Duty, Reservist, or National Guard participant who served in one of the five military branches. In the researcher's understanding of the full breadth of military transition from the literature, the words *career transition* and *reintegration* are used interchangeably to describe a service member's transition from active duty to the civilian workforce. Additional definitions of terms used in this literature review are as follows:

1. *Military Retiree (Retired Veteran)* - someone who has served at least 20 years of military service and received a DD214 form or served under honorable conditions and was discharged prior to 20 years for a service-related reason and received a DD214 form.
2. *Non-commissioned Officer* - better known as NCO, an enlisted service member who has been promoted to a supervisory rank (E4 and above) based on performance and professional development that do not require an undergraduate degree.
3. *OIF/OEF* - Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom were deployment missions of the U.S. military after the September 11, 2001 attacks to fight the war on terrorism.

4. *Permanent Change of Station* - known as PCS in the military realm, this is a household and job move from one military base to another.
5. *Rank* - military pay grade and positioning in the armed forces that ranges from E1-E9 (or W1-W5) for enlisted service members and O1-O10 for officers.
6. *Reintegration* - a service member who has retired or separated from the armed forces and now seeks to find employment and complete social life in the civilian sector.
7. *Separated* - someone who has served in the armed services but ultimately resigned under honorable conditions and has not met the minimum allowable time for retirement from the armed forces.
8. *Service member* - someone who has served in one of the five United States military branches including the Air Force, Navy, Marines, Army, or Coast Guard.
9. *Veteran* - someone who has served on active duty with the military for an ordered, specified amount of time and received a DD214 form for discharge from military service.
10. *Military Occupational Specialty* - known as an MOS, is the type of job/career a service member holds while serving in the military.
11. *Battle Buddy* - a friend in the military who has served with a member of the service (i.e., in the same unit/command).

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since acquiring another career after the military is one of a service member's top priorities, then understanding how veterans learn during this process is an important aspect of their reintegration (Clemens & Milson, 2008). By examining how separated enlisted veterans experienced career transition, this research sought to address the potential hindrances faced by that population.

This chapter is divided into two topical sections. The first section is a review of the literature involving transition theory and military career transition challenges. Reviewing the literature on military career transition challenges helped the researcher understand what issues already exist and if they are relevant to the separated enlisted veteran population. Additionally, the literature on transition theory provided a framework for understanding the military reintegration process. It provided a general overview of its processes and relevant models. The military career transition literature reviewed was limited to those that came up in a keyword search using the terms *military, reintegration, separation,* and *transition*. Each term was used separately and collectively in Teachers College Catalog, ProQuest, ERIC, Digital Dissertations, and Super Search to find sources relevant to the research. The second section of this chapter focuses on two adult learning areas of research, with the purpose of providing a theoretical grounding for the study that

is applicable to veteran career transition. These areas are experiential learning and self-directed learning that give insight into where individuals are drawing their learning from and ultimately the meaning they make from it. These two bodies of literature provided the conceptual framework for the examination and analysis of the learning experiences being explored.

Military Career Transition

Generally, veterans have struggled with overall reintegration to the civilian world, but the challenges have been historic in transitioning to the civilian workforce (Wolpert, 1989). King (2011) described the transition from military service to civilian employment as being a laborious process for the service member. The notion of having to unlearn tacit military job functions and then learn what is considered implied knowledge in the civilian workforce can be a task all in itself (King, 2011; Wolpert, 1989). Not only do veterans deal with the same developmental career challenges as their civilian counterparts, but they also face difficulties in adapting to a new culture that includes having to communicate differently, change their identities, and adjust to a personal and professional life that has much more ambiguity than their disciplined structured life in the military did (Clemens & Milson, 2008; Fleming, 2008; Robertson, 2010).

A body of research exists that combines experiential and self-directed learning principles with career transition analysis. This body of research is known as transition theory and can be categorized as the nucleus of the types of learning adults encounter during transitions (Bridges, 2009; Schlossberg, 2011). Described as a process, “it involves leaving one set of roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions and

establishing new ones over time" (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 49). Seeing that military career transition is a process most service members experience when they transition from the armed forces, having a foundation in career transition theory would provide additional clarity in the exploration of their learning experiences.

Career Transition Theory

Most adults who are in a space where they are transitioning can articulate their challenges with the process and how it has affected other areas of their life (Schlossberg, 2011). Moreover, "when they are able to explore the issue more fully, understand the underlying meaning, and develop a plan, they are more likely to be able to cope effectively and resolve the problem" (p. 37).

Fiske and Chiriboga (1990) conducted a 12-year study on transitioning adults and their descriptions of the world at significant points in their life. They found that understanding and evaluating an individual's behavior is more important than age because participants were faced with similar challenges, discoveries, and negotiations. Although age was not important, the obstacles each adult faced at that particular point in their life played a significant role in how the adult approached transitions. This transition framework is similar to the potential differences between retired and separated veterans transitioning from the military because they both are going from military to civilian life; however, being at two different life stages may alter their description of that experience.

Schlossberg's transition model categorizes these two phenomena as anticipated and unanticipated transitions. Generally speaking, veterans who spend 20 or more years before they retire from the military have more time to plan, address, and potentially cope with their transition. On the other hand, separated veterans experience more of an

unpredictable chain of events because of uncertainty with future career options, education opportunities, and overall civilian life that can classify their transition as unanticipated. Moreover, for separated veterans, there may be limited growth from their military experience that takes place during transition (Schlossberg, 2011). Even though there is limited growth to draw from, obvious and subtle changes are occurring during the transition process that require veterans to adjust their behavior, roles, and expectations of the future (Fiske & Chiriboga, 1990; Schlossberg, 2011).

Schlossberg (2011) discussed the 4S system that describes how adults are influenced when coping with transitions. The 4S system consists of situation, self, support, and strategic resources in each area that determines how they manage change. It is noted that adults have both assets and liabilities when they experience transitions. If the assets are greater than the liabilities, then the adult is less likely to have challenges with making a transition, whereas if the liabilities are greater than the assets, then the transition will be more difficult. Figure 1 is an illustration of the assets and liabilities in adults as they cope with change.

The 4S system is a cyclical process adults experience as they navigate through transitions in life. Situation refers to the internal and/or external events that have a direct effect on the transition. Context plays a major role in how adults make sense of their lives in a transition period, including characteristics such as role change, timing, and how much control they have over the situation. Self is also context-driven because personality and demographic characteristics explain how each person makes meaning of his or her transition or the world as a whole. Pearlin and Lieberman's (1979) study found that adults with "distinguishing social characteristics" such as those unemployed, are more

likely to have greater liabilities and struggle with transition. Support, in the positive form from family, friends, or networks, may be a resource during the transition process (Pearlin & Lieberman, 1979).

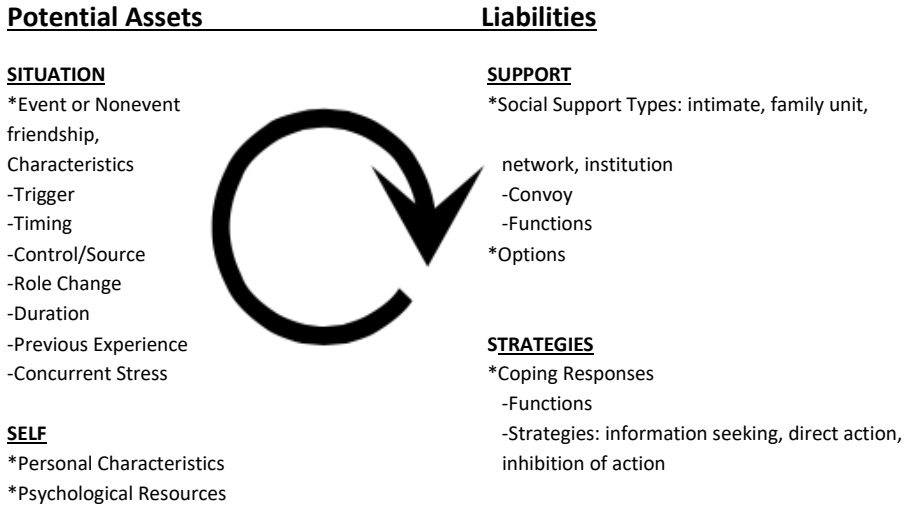

Figure 1. Coping resources: The 4S system

The four ways adults are influenced when coping with transitions posed by the 4S system has several implications for separated enlisted veterans. When transitioning to the civilian workforce, veterans are in a situation where they are taking on new roles that can cause different levels of stress. In this case, it can range from having to seek another job outside of their military occupation or being unable to find one at all. In addition, identifying what are the specific causes of stress, frustration, or hopelessness in moving in, through, and out of that transition process is potentially helpful for people in transitions (Schlossberg, 2011). Self-identity is important in the transition process, considering that all service members in this research will have a deployment background that may have affected their reintegration due to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or

other mental health disabilities. For this research, PTSD and other mental health disorders are acknowledged, but an in-depth review of the literature is beyond the scope of this study. Support systems are equally important for veterans and can vary from family, friends, career networks, or former military colleagues. Some veterans are balancing families, higher education pursuits, and cultural nuances along with their transition, in which the potential for concurrent stress is high. Stress levels may be high because veterans may not have identified why stress is being caused or how they can properly manage it while transitioning (Schlossberg, 2011). Lastly, finding universal strategic information that provides veterans with the all the tools for transitioning successfully is an ideal goal for military personnel and others tasked with assisting them in the process.

In veterans' quest for strategies to help them cope with the transition process, they must first understand what their specific barriers are (Schlossberg, 2011). Of the veteran reintegration challenges that currently exist in the literature, the researcher found three major themes: the effectiveness of military transition programs, civilian hindrance, and adaption to change. The themes highlighted the major challenges for veterans during reintegration into the civilian workforce, with most of its military participants being a part of the retired community. In addition, its limitation in career transition among separated enlisted personnel is not emphasized in the literature, and thus there is a need for continued research in this area (Diffenauer, 2010; King, 2011).

Transition Programs

Upon departure from the military, service members may attend a 3- to 5-day military-funded career transition program that was designed largely for job search and civilian career preparation (Baruch & Quick, 2009; Hoffeditz, 2006; Hunt, 2007; Silva,

2011; Wolpert, 1989). The most recent career transition program was enacted in the early 1990s, appropriately named Transition Assistance Program (TAP), which sought to meet the evolving needs of military veterans transitioning to the civilian workforce (Baruch & Quick, 2009; Hoffeditz, 2006). The TAP is considered a "preparation for separating service members and their families to provide them with the skills, tools, and self-confidence necessary to ensure a successful reentry into the nation's civilian workforce" (Hunt, 2007, p. 20). Despite the TAP being mandatory for some branches, researchers have found that many service members do not attend for various reasons related or unrelated to their departure from the military (Baruch & Quick, 2009). Clemens and Milsom's (2008) study found that out of 217,717 service members separating from the military in 2008, only 118,857 people attended a TAP workshop, which suggests that a vast number of soldiers are transitioning without any career preparation transition skills for the civilian workforce.

Baruch and Quick's (2009) research found that retiring Navy Admirals' responses to TAPs were that the program should be encouraged and supported but not forced on the service members. It also implied that retired, high-ranking officers are the best people to make recommendations for transition services and how service members can benefit from them (Baruch & Quick, 2009). On the contrary, Sharkey (2011) hypothesized from the current military transition literature that service members were not career transition experts, and each veteran may have experienced the TAP differently. Hoffeditz's (2006) research echoed this by summarizing how the effectiveness of the TAP workshop depends on the service members' experiences, including their financial needs and overall anxiety levels about transitioning. Moreover, today's service members are struggling with

different psychological and emotional challenges related to their career transition than veterans prior to the inception of the TAP workshop in the early 1990s (Hoffeditz, 2006; Nelson, 2009). Given the differences in military ranks, low TAP attendance, and potential disparity in education between officers and enlisted service members, current TAP workshops may not be meeting the needs of separated enlisted service members (Dixon-Brugh, 2011; Wolpert, 1989).

Sharkey (2011) suggested more research should be conducted on the effectiveness of military career transition programs—specifically, how service members learn in their career transition experience what would determine a successful or unsuccessful transition (Robertson, 2010; Sharkey, 2011). Sharkey's quantitative study findings proposed that current research did not provide enough information to make adequate recommendations for the TAP workshop. In addressing the learned experiences derived from challenges with the TAP program and the service members' career transition as a whole, further research may provide additional examination of the continued development of improving military career transition programs.

Civilian Hindrance

The review of the literature revealed another common theme during veterans' transition: civilian lack of understanding of the military culture as a hindrance to veterans during their reintegration to the civilian workforce (Diffenauer, 2010; Fleming, 2008; King, 2011). Robertson's (2010) research found that after transitioning to civilian employment, some veterans felt as though civilians did not appreciate their deployment backgrounds and discredited their military experience. In some cases, veterans may have equivalent military experience for a civilian job, but also different credentials than their

civilian counterparts that would make them ineligible or scrutinized by their co-workers. Already being flustered by traditional career transition challenges and then possibly having to prove their competencies in the civilian workplace could add to the difficulties of a veteran reintegrating into the civilian world (Clemens & Milson, 2008; Diffenauer, 2010; Petrovich, 2012; Robertson, 2010).

These challenges may be especially prevalent among younger, separated veterans because they have fewer years of experience than retired veterans. Perreault's (1981) research addressed the importance of how veterans need to "identify with their co-workers as a social group" in order for them to have a successful transition (p. 2). A social group needs to mimic the relationships the members had within the military structures. Graves's (2005) work suggested that veterans receive emotional fulfillment from positive interpersonal relationships with their co-workers that aid in overall life satisfaction with their transition from the military. With no guarantees that their civilian counterparts will be susceptible to assisting them in their transition, this may be a daunting process for many veterans. To adapt to their civilian workforce, they may need to transform their identity and mindset to transition successfully (Baruch & Quick, 2009; Carter-Boyd, 2012; Savion, 2009).

Adaptation to Change

Some earlier studies on military transition highlighted the importance of service members being able to adapt to their new lifestyle and adjusting to their post-military careers as vital to their successful reintegration (Manning, 1979; Perreault, 1981; Wolpert, 1989). Veterans have been conditioned since boot camp to think, live, and assume the values of the military in their everyday lives (Savion, 2009; Wolpert, 1989).

The military has an authoritative hierarchy and a structured lifestyle that provides predictability for career, housing, food, and other essential living elements. On the contrary, civilians do not have such a structure to guide their everyday lives, giving them more freedom to make their own decisions. Furthermore, in these economic times, the job market has much more uncertainty in the civilian workforce about anticipating what the future will hold (Yanos, 2004). Consequently, making the transition to the civilian sector that requires adapting to these new roles and abandoning some of their previous ones can be a potential traumatic experience for some veterans.

Although the military is known for teaching essential qualities such as discipline, leadership, and loyalty, the research has shown that these attributes may not make veterans more adaptable to the civilian workforce (King, 2011; West, 2000; Yanos, 2004). Adaptation, as explained by Baruch and Quick (2009), requires service members to have a "change of mental map" that entails adjusting their points of view, values, and possibly beliefs on career transition (Baruch & Quick, 2009). Considering the focal point is the challenges that separated enlisted service members experienced during career transition, the adult learning lens provides a unique understanding of the process by which veterans change their beliefs, values, and perspectives in order to adapt to the civilian career workforce (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgarten, 2007).

Summary of Military Career Transition

The literature has suggested that the military career transition process poses challenges for most veterans as they go from active duty to the civilian workforce. Separated enlisted veterans may be more perplexed by this process because they have less time to plan and fewer years of work experience to prepare them properly for civilian

employment. Drawing from Schlossberg's theory, transitions can have both assets and liabilities that veterans must balance to be successful (Schlossberg & Robinson, 1996). Given the contextual nature of a transition, they must first make sense of all the challenges; then they must focus on their self, support, and strategies to navigate through the challenges and transition. Schlossberg's theory emerged from the transition research as one of the most relevant to this study because she created a framework that conceptualizes the way people make sense of their transition (Anderson et al., 2012).

To have effective strategies, veterans should know what their biggest challenges are. The military career transition literature found transition programs, civilian hindrance, and adaptation to change as the biggest liabilities. Transition programs posed challenges because service members are not attending or the information is not sufficient in providing a successful reintegration. Civilian hindrance was found to be an issue for veterans because the civilian workforce community may have biases in working with or hiring them for employment with preconceived notions about their military backgrounds. On the other hand, the apprehension that service members have about civilian employment expressed through feelings of awkwardness or fear of not being accepted into civilian work social groups also plays a key factor in civilian hindrance. Lastly, adapting to change was the most common theme as veterans have to change "mental maps" in their civilian careers by adjusting to new traditions, company values, and social groups in order to integrate fully and have a successful transition (Barauch & Quick, 2009). Often, veterans draw from previous military experience to help them with their transition and allow adaptability to be a form of resilience as they reintegrate into the civilian workforce.

Veterans need to find a form of experiential learning to obtain balance between their new careers and personal worlds (Merriam, 1991; Schlossberg & Robinson, 1996). Adult educators have used experiential and self-directed learning theories to help people construct new ways of making sense of their personal and professional transitions for years. Both adult development theories are contextual and provided the conceptual framework for this research in understanding how separated enlisted service members experience career transition after leaving active duty and going into the civilian workforce.

Experiential Learning Theory

As illustrated from the military reintegration challenges literature review, veterans can potentially encounter several different life-changing experiences when transitioning to the civilian world. Although they may utilize past experiences to assist in their transition, constructing new ways of knowing is vital for learning in a new environment. Despite the notion that all learning begins with an experience, the influx of information and contextual factors can be a challenge when trying to decipher what is substantial. Nicolades and Yorks (2008) summarized this inundation of data by saying:

> A paradox of our contemporary organizations and society is that we are accumulating new knowledge at an ever-increasing rate, while at the same time we are confronted with the potential disasters of the unanticipated, nonlinear consequences of this accumulating body of knowledge. Even as our knowledge base in terms of seeing learning as a noun is becoming more and more rich, our sense of control over our world is becoming less. It is as if we are becoming less knowing even as we become more knowledgeable. Addressing this paradox, we suggest, requires we look at the process of learning, and take seriously the implications of understanding learning as a verb. (p. 7)

To understand better how adults develop cognitively and make meaning of their experiences, experiential learning is a theory used inside or outside of formal environments. Itin (1999) provided an elaborate definition describing experiential learning as the change in an individual that results from reflection on a direct experience and results in new abstractions and application. This definition is very fitting for veterans as they transition and potentially encounter myriad experiences in the civilian work sector. On a practical level, there are two different ways to view experiential learning, including using past experiences to inform future decisions and using current issues to inform new decisions (English, 2005). Both views insist that experience is pivotal in discerning how learning is constructed for adults. Most theorists of experiential learning would argue that experience is an integral part of the adult development process as we grow personally and professionally (Kolb, 1984; Merriam et al., 2007).

Fenwick (2005) introduced several theoretical frameworks to view experiential learning to understand what type of knowledge is being constructed. With the understanding that the military population is vastly different from the general public in terms of career transition, it is helpful to understand what framework best fits their perspectives. (a) The *complexity theory perspective* is where learners do not instigate change through organizations, but seek to open spaces for the system to experiment with changing itself (Merriam et al., 2007). In this lens, learners test different learning experiences as a means for innovation, change, and/or prevention. (b) The *critical cultural perspective* is where learners see the influence of power relationships on their lives. In addition, learners tend to renounce the primary realities of their experience based on cultural norms. (c) The *psychoanalytic perspective* is the analysis of the learner's

psychic conflicts that may impede learning. Researchers have postulated that "people need to work through any negative feelings that have arisen and eventually set those aside while retaining and enhancing the positive feelings for learning to occur" (Merriam et al., 2007). (d) The *situative perspective* is the process of learning in action. This approach is contextual and requires social interplay to drive the learning of the individual. This perspective removes learning from the cognitive process with the goal of "making thinking visible" (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Lastly, (e) the most utilized framework is the *constructivist perspective* that makes meaning of experiences from critical reflection. Although complex because of its whole person process, this model characterizes reflection as central to the transformation of the person through experience. Service members may experience parts of each perspective in the transition process; however, for this research, critical reflection is the framework used in experiential learning.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory

David Kolb is an adult learning researcher who stressed the importance of critical reflection in experiential learning theory. He is known for his experiential learning cycle that was grounded in the work of Dewey, Piaget, and Lewin. Its approach combines pragmatism, social psychology, and cognitive development to understand better how adults learn from their experiences (Kolb et al., 1999). Kolb (1984) believed experiential learning is "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transforming of experience" (p. 41). Below is an illustration of his experiential learning model that consists of interdependent stages continuously repeating itself throughout one's life:

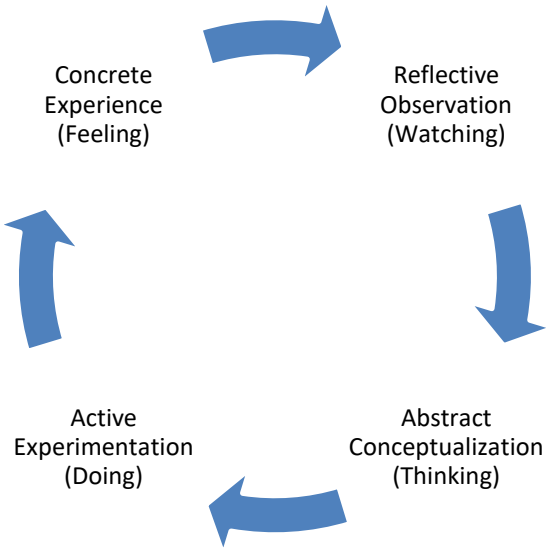

Figure 2. Kolb's experiential learning process

Kolb's (1984) model is a four-stage cyclical process that includes: 1st Stage, Concrete Experience (CE); 2nd Stage, Reflective Observation (RO); 3rd Stage, Abstract Conceptualization (AC); and 4th Stage, Active Experimentation (AE). Concrete experience is defined as a relevant, meaningful event that can create the space for reflection. Other theorists believed that specific contexts shape an individual's experience in different ways, specifically their past histories, learning strategies, and emotional influences (Merriam et al., 2007). Since all learning begins with an experience, ensuring that its ability to produce a significant learning outcome can be challenging (Jarvis, 1987). Kolb synthesized that "learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes and it continues for adults with the potential for learning from each experience encountered in life" (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 163).

Reflective Observation (2nd stage) consists of reflecting on concrete experiences until analytical and hypothetical thinking occurs regarding the implications. In its

simplest form, RO is about physically being still to observe emotions rather than reacting on them (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Reflection is a common internal evaluation method; however, the extent of reflection often varies. Kolb's model says the concrete experience must be observed and reflected upon with the objective of generating new experiences (Merriam et al., 2007). In the third stage, the implications from reflective observations are known as the abstract conceptualization of the experience. This stage acknowledges that thinking becomes a deliberate undertaking for discovering associations between what we experience and the end results (Beard & Wilson, 2006). Essentially, experiential learning has the capacity to be utilized for cognitive learning.

Lastly, actively experimenting involves testing the abstract conceptualizations to create new experiences, thus creating a repetitive process of learning and development. Kolb (1984) believed high-order purposeful actions should be a part of the experimentation process that resulted from a variety of perspectives. Other experiential learning theorists took it a step further by saying that for people to interpret experiences positively and to make meaning of their learning, they need to have confidence in their abilities, good self-esteem, support from others, and trust in others (Merriam et al., 2007; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). With this, the primary goal is for the learner to have a "fully integrated personality" (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 164).

Summary of Experiential Learning Theory

Through this lens, understanding the lived experiences of separated enlisted veterans' career transition relies on the significance of their experiences, reflection, and abstractly viewing the issues and how they have actively experimented with different solutions. This adult learning theory informed this research as to what previous

experiences pose as hindrances and may have affected the transition of separated enlisted veterans. Kolb's model is straightforward when describing experiential learning in comparison to other models; however, it has been critiqued for not taking context into account or addressing issues of power during the learning process. Given the structure of the military, these two critiques pose potential limitations when trying to understand if their learning experiences were critically reflective or non-reflective, but for this research, how veterans describe their individual experiences will suffice (English, 2005; Merriam et al., 2007).

The construction of our experience is affected by our "psychological history," and so the military lifestyle plays a significant role in how veterans make meaning of their civilian reintegration (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 164). They must make sense of past experiences in order to understand their goals in life and ultimately use them as resources for new learning (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Moreover, this literature gives a clearer understanding of how to address the research questions because it provides a framework that situates the veterans' transition experiences with the goal of producing a higher quality of data to analyze. In addition to understanding past experiences, veteran capacity to be self-directed in their learning is also important when transitioning to the civilian workforce.

Self-Directed Learning

We are living in a fast-changing environment in which it is no longer possible to learn everything we need to know in formal education environments; therefore, one of our most important roles as adult educators is to support self-directed learning (LeBerre,

1997). LeBerre's thinking is in line with the research on veteran reintegration challenges that suggests transition programs offered by the military do not properly prepare service members for the civilian workforce. Since self-directed learning is often used in explaining how adults learn and make meaning of their life experiences, this lens of adult development provides a piece of the framework in understanding the military career transition process.

Conceptually, most researchers have organized self-directed learning in a category as a process, personal attribute, or combination of both. Primarily grounded in the work of Houle and Tough, their descriptions of self-directed learning have spun a plethora of endorsements and critiques surrounding the very nature and application of this theory (Merriam et al., 2007). Their research considered a humanist approach from their understanding of self-directed learning in how humans have vast potential for growth and development. Houle and Tough studied self-directed learning through observation and concluded that adults are very self-planned in their learning and purposely take on "learning projects" to obtain new information and skill sets (Merriam et al., 2007). In the academic research, there are varying definitions of what constitutes self-direction in learning; however, an important aspect of its nature is that learners take ownership of what, why, and how an unfamiliar concept is learned. Knowles's (1975) definition and process of self-directed learning is probably the most noted because he believed it should be viewed as:

> a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing, and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes. (p. 18)

Knowles's definition implies the more deliberate an adult is in striving for greater self-direction, the more maturity and learning occur. Although many respect his perspective, it has also garnered many critiques that have created much debate about self-directed learning as an adult development theory. On the contrary, it has also provided many other contributions to understanding and applying this form of adult learning to multiple populations. Specifically, self-directed learning has implications that, if utilized as a foundation for learning, have the capacity to have breadth and power in the military career transition process (Candy, 1991; Merriam et al., 2007).

Knowles's research on self-directed learning produced the concept of "andragogy," which is a model or theory of teaching adults how to learn. It is similar to experiential learning in that he believes it is imperative to an adult's overall development; however, its distinction is that self-directed learning depends on the individual commitment, support, and encouragement of others (Candy, 1991). Andragogy assumes the following about learners: (a) adults become more self-directing as they develop cognitively and physically; (b) experiential learning is invaluable for future learning; (c) social roles have an impact on willingness and preparation for being self-directing; (d) adult development shifts priorities, frames of minds, and application, creating a more challenged focused learning experience; (e) the most substantial motivation for adult learners are intrinsic; and (f) adults are inquisitive about the reasons and processes for learning (Merriam et al., 2007). The overall goal was for an individual or facilitator to provide a safe space for learning to be identified, collectively supported, and freely explored (Merriam et al., 2007).

These assumptions set the groundwork for theory design and models for self-directed learning processes and conceptualizations. Knowles (1975) outlined a linear six-step process for implementation of self-directed learning that (a) establishes a learning environment that is mutually encouraging and respectful; (b) diagnoses learning needs; (c) formulates learning goals; (d) identifies human and material resources for learning; (e) chooses and implements appropriate learning strategies; and (f) evaluates learning needs. This process postulates that learners will have a higher level of motivation and an overall greater sense of self. Ultimately, the results will reflect adults having a greater control of their whole learning process and future goals (English, 2005).

As a linear model, Knowles's theory of andragogy has been criticized for not taking into account the adult learners' contextual factors that may prohibit or challenge their ability to be self-directed. As self-directed learning evolved as a theory, researchers such as Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) created a Personal Responsibility Orientation (PRO) model that takes into account learner processes and personality attributes. PRO factors in the context that "centers on a learner's desire or preference for assuming responsibility for learning" (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 13). The model is considered an instructional learning process that adult learners plan, implement, and evaluate their self to be accountable for environmental circumstances. Accountability for environmental circumstances does not necessarily mean control over all life situations, but rather adults' willingness to manage their response to unforeseen life conditions (Stockdale, 2003). The PRO model continued to advance in its conception of understanding self-directed learning by Stockdale (2003), who constructed a Personal Orientation to Self-Direction in Learning Scale (PRO-SDLS). Stockdale's 35-item PRO-SDLS scale was tested on

undergraduate and graduate college students in an attempt to create a reliable measure of self-directed learning based on Brockett and Hiemstra's PRO model concept. The scale was highly successful and suggested that when adult learners operate within their social environment, it can contribute to the outcome of their level of self-direction in learning (Stockdale, 2003, p. 9). Stockdale's research can be applicable to veterans because it implies that if they successfully assimilate by creating positive work and social environments, they can increase their ability to be more self-directed in their career.

Another contextual critique of the seminal work of Malcolm Knowles on self-directed learning is the non-existent sociohistorical reference in his research. Modern researchers have argued that this particular area is overlooked and assumes all adults are development-oriented and free from disenfranchisement. Sandlin (2005) provided five issues from multiple perspectives that should be considered in the self-directed learning setting to include the assumptions that: (a) education is viewed and valued the same across all cultures; (b) all educators and adult learners look and learn alike; (c) other philosophies of learning not being considered, some point of views are not acknowledged; (d) position of self and society are not taken into account along with privileges and oppressions based on race, gender, and class that influence learning; and (e) status quo attitudes reproduce society's inequalities by not valuing learners from different cultures and backgrounds (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 88). Mocker and Spear's (1982) work echoed some of these issues because they suggested that being self-directed is a "learn as you go" methodology that incorporates all life experiences in a multitude of settings. They also implied that in order to understand the complex relationship between the individual and the social environment, an element of opportunity in one's

environment, past or present knowledge, and/or chance occurrence has to be imminent. This suggests that self-directed learning may not happen in a linear fashion but rolls between many different sets of experiences and contexts that will eventually mesh together into a concrete learning encounter (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

In acknowledging contextual factors, some researchers have recognized the importance of experiential history in self-directed learning. Candy (1991) conceived that learners may have a high level of self-direction in areas about which they have prior experience or general knowledge. Moreover, the level of learning is determined by their ability and opportunities to be autonomous. He asserted that self-direction is constructivist because there is an individual and a social construction of meaning making from knowledge that manifests during the adult learning process (Merriam et al., 2007). His work challenges early assumptions on self-directed learning by focusing on the personal attributes and processes of the learner within individual contexts.

Candy delineated two processes within his model, including instructional and autodidactic. Instructional is situated in formal institutions and is noted as being either teacher- or learner-controlled. The confinement of the organization dictates how much a learner can be self-directed along with the teacher's ideology about instruction in the classroom. Costa and Kallick (2004) considered too much dependency on the teacher as detrimental to the ability to be self-directed because there is no room for mistakes and ultimately the learning that comes from it. Being self-directed should never replace the teacher in every situation; however, it is important to have the ability to be self-managing as a confident and competent lifelong learner (Candy, 1991; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Autodidactic is situated outside of formal institutions and learners can be either assisted

or unassisted in their self-directed learning pursuits. Instructional and autodidaxy speak to the process of the learner, but are contingent upon the learner's ability to be personally autonomous and self-managing. These two attributes are important not only for the learner but for the instructor or facilitator of the adult learner as well. No definitive definition of personal autonomy has been reached among self-directed researchers, but consensus is that generally adult learners want to have a true sense of it, along with freedom and willingness in their life actions (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy, 1991; Costa & Kallick, 2004; Deci & Ryan, 1991; Grow, 1991).

The distinction between Candy's conceptualization about adult learners being personally autonomous is the assumption that all adults are disciplined enough to learn in that realm. If unique needs and skill sets are not taken into account when structuring learning activities, it is counterproductive to their capacity to be autonomous (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Grow's model argued that where the learner is in the learning process is key to an adult's development. Grounded in situational leadership, he grouped learners in stages of dependent, interested, involved, and self-directed learning (Grow, 1991). In his goal to organize learning experiences, he proposed that his model is efficient for formal settings because of its situational and instructional complexity. In addition, because the learners' personal situations and contexts will vary, understanding their autonomous behavior will provide clarification on how learners experience the process of being self-directed. As the military is one of the most diverse organizations in the country, taking into consideration the personal context and ability to be autonomous is an important factor in this research.

Summary of Self-Directed Learning

As one of the most researched topics in adult development, educators of adults have to decide how we understand self-directed learning and how it applies in our private practices (English, 2005). Lifelong learning is a concept that adult development researchers use, in which its relevance to the military is apparent in their history and traditions. Creating the opportunity and subsequent application of lifelong learning has often been questioned; nevertheless, its vision is still obvious and available for transferability to different arenas of a veteran's life. Lastly, when considering the likelihood of service members coming from a variety of cultural and educational backgrounds, one would conclude that military educators have to adapt military reintegration strategies to different levels based on the veterans' needs.

In conclusion, it is important to note that self-directed learning can occur across a range of contexts for a variety of reasons as well as understanding process, personality attributes, and environmental factors when examining self-directed learning in adults (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). In reviewing the mosaic of different models and theories in self-directed learning, it appears fundamental that adult learners need to create or have a space for independent thinking. Self-directed learning informed this research because knowing if a veteran was exposed to an environment that fostered independent thinking for adult learners may provide insight into better understanding how separated enlisted service members experience the career transition process. LeBerre (1997) put the military career transition process into perspective for veterans by saying, "Adults new to self-directed learning often begin with disorientation and confusion, especially if there is a major discrepancy between expectations and experience. However, once learners are

aware of the problem they can begin to move on to exploration, reflection, reorientation, and equilibrium" (p. 17).

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework was used to provide structure and framing for this research (see Figure 3). The researcher's purpose in the study was to explore the learning experiences of enlisted veterans transitioning from active duty to the civilian work sector. To obtain a better understanding of this purpose, four research questions were formulated. In reviewing the literature on experiential learning, self-directed learning, and military career transition, these topics provided theoretical lenses to frame the study. This conceptual framework connected the literature review with the purpose and research questions to guide the researcher in the research design steps as well as the analysis, interpretation, and synthesis process.

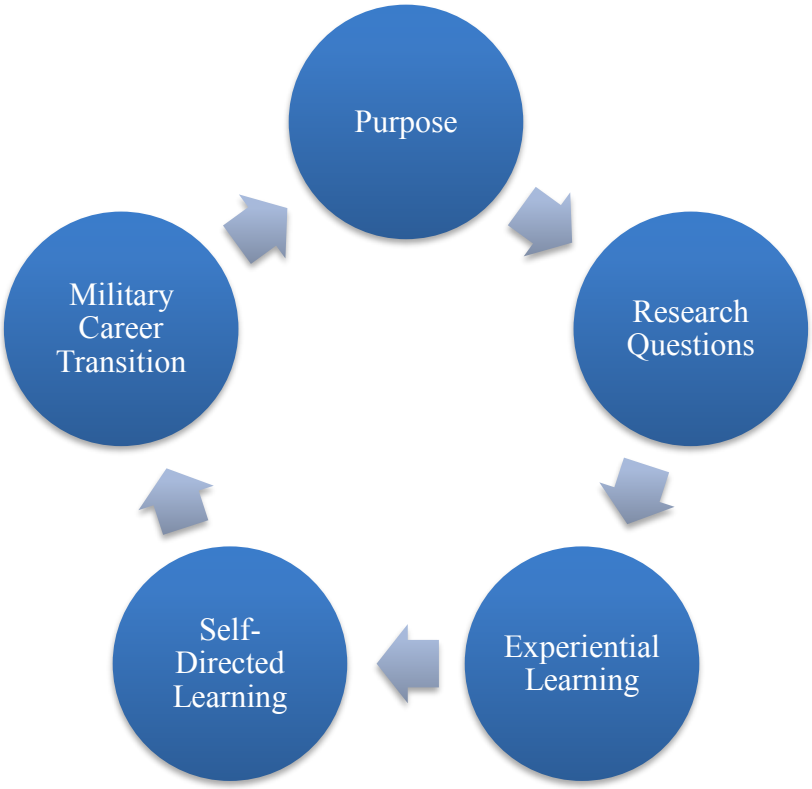

Figure 3. Conceptual framework

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the learning experiences of veterans after they have transitioned from the military to the civilian workforce. With the utilization of a qualitative study design, this research explored the lived experiences of their career transition. Specifically, the overarching research question was: How do separated enlisted service members experience career transition after leaving active duty and going into the civilian workforce? An exploratory interview methodology was selected to best answer the subquestions in the research as follows:

1. How do veterans describe their transition from active duty to the civilian workforce?
2. What challenges did veterans experience during their transition from active duty to the civilian workforce?
3. What type of resources were utilized by veterans to assist with their transition to the civilian workforce?
4. What personal and professional influences do veterans describe as an advantage or disadvantage during the reintegration process?

To accomplish this purpose, veteran participants were selected from a purposeful sampling process. This chapter discusses the research design, rationale for the methodology approach, data collection methods, and analysis/synthesis of the data. Additionally, this chapter describes the potential validity and reliability issues that arose and what limitations this study occupied.

Research Design

This qualitative inquiry utilized an exploratory interview design to describe the learning experiences of military veterans. This method was employed because the researcher "wanted to understand a real-life phenomenon in depth, but such understanding encompasses important contextual conditions" (Yin, 2014, p. 18). In alignment with the conceptual framework, contextual factors are important because in this case, they are not clearly evident and the overarching goal is to understand how each participant made meaning of his or her experiences. Moreover, it allows the researcher to go into depth with participants and have multiple perspectives within a bounded system (Creswell, 2005; Yin, 2014).

An exploratory interview methodology was also chosen because the research questions sought to explain "how" and "why" social phenomena (Yin, 2014). Explaining these two social phenomena involved two methods of data collection in which this study chose a focus group and interviews to find themes among the findings. Furthermore, it is noted that exploratory methodologies are an established research approach where the focus is on an individual, a group, or an organization (Robson, 2002). Knowing the gaps in literature as related to separated enlisted veterans, the individual and group aspects of

interviews can provide opportunities of rich dialogue and valuable reflection, thus making the individual subjects themselves the unit of analysis. When utilizing exploratory interviews, there is an exclusionary consideration to the unit of analysis that clarifies the scope of the research, making it most suitable for a study of the reintegration experience of military veterans (Yin, 2014).

Areas of Information Needed

Areas of information needed for this study were demographic, theoretical (conceptual), and perceptual data. Demographic data obtained for this study included age, ethnicity, marital status, children, academic education/military education, civilian work experience, phone/email, and military background information.

The literature review in Chapter II was the foundation for the theoretical information needed in the methodology of this research. It included the background on the military career transition process with a transition theory lens as well as two adult education concepts in experiential and self-directed learning. Collectively, these theories formed the conceptual framework for the research and ultimately assisted in analyzing and synthesizing the data results.

The perceptual data needed were gathered from the demographic inventory, interviews, and focus group to understand how veterans learn during reintegration, as guided by the research questions. The inventory was sent out prior to the first interview. This included mostly demographic data, but also military background information that assisted in the flow/tone of the interview. Below, Table 1 illustrates the perceptual data collection and analysis methods.

Table 1

Perceptual Data Needed

Information Needed	Collection Methods	Tools	Analyzing Methods
Demographic Information	Inventory or Survey	Survey monkey (online survey database and paper-based document)	Compiled from handouts/emails and analyzed findings
Veteran lived individual experience responses	One In-person Interview	Tape recorder; journaling; notes; Potential follow-up interview if needed for clarification	Sent audio for professional transcription and used Dedoose software to code and synthesize/analyze
Veteran lived experience responses	Focus Group	Tape recorder; journaling; notes	Sent audio for professional transcription and used Dedoose software to code and synthesize/ analyze

Overview of Research Design

Qualitative methodologies were chosen for this research because they were most appropriate for exploring how military veterans learn and make meaning of career transition. Furthermore, the processes enlisted service members experience and what outcomes are a result of them allowed the researcher to understand this particular context and the interactions therein (Maxwell, 2005). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) described how this type of research is:

> Multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials including case study, personal experience, introspective, life story interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' lives. (p. 3)

This research included rich inquiries using exploratory interviews and data analysis that were inductive, with the expectation of establishing patterns and themes (Creswell, 2007). Inquiries as such can provide a means for exploring multiple realities to understanding military transitions. Therefore, using an exploratory study approach, the "focus of qualitative research was on participants' perceptions and experiences, and the way they made sense of their lives" (Maxwell, 2005; Yin, 2014).

Exploratory studies are "an exploration of a bounded system or a case over time through detailed in-depth data collection methods involving multiple sources of information in rich context" (Creswell, 2005, p. 589). Specifically, this approach was used to explore the learning experiences of enlisted military personnel with deployment backgrounds transitioning to the civilian workforce. Moreover, the sources of information were obtained from the interviews and focus group.

Exploratory studies, when the researcher seeks to "illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they are taken, how they were implemented, and with what result," can be useful in trying to understand how their subjects make sense of their situations (Yin, 2014, p. 58). Thus, a qualitative approach using exploratory interviews to illustrate this phenomenon was relevant to eliciting the participants' lived experiences, views, and opinions (Creswell, 2005). The researcher believed that this spotlight on the individual understanding of the enlisted service members through the exploratory study approach was particularly useful for exploring learning during military transitions.

Table 2 shows the steps the researcher took to move through the study to collect and analyze the data.

Table 2

Research Design Steps

Study Sample

The sampling size for this research was 15 U.S. military veterans who were purposefully selected because of their experience transitioning from the military to the civilian work sector that ultimately informed the research problem (Creswell, 2007). In addition, the lived experiences from transitioning provided insight into the research questions and how the veterans made sense of the process. Through the researcher's military networks, she was able to gain access to and contact information for 22 veterans who seemed to fit the study's criteria. Potential participants who had immediate computer access were asked to complete the demographic inventory on a Google document, while

those who did not have access were completed in person or over the phone to ensure they met the criteria selection. Of the 22 contacted, only 15 met all of the criteria.

The physical solicitation of veterans was done based on access from the Delaware Veterans Affairs Office & National Guard, the National Guard Bureau, and the researcher's military affiliations with the U.S. Navy, U.S. Air Force, and U.S. Coast Guard. The criteria for selection were as follows:

- Must have been a U.S. veteran from one of the five military branches that include the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Navy, U.S. Air Force, U.S. Marines, or U.S. Army, and who were active duty status after September 11, 2001.
- Must have fulfilled at least one active duty enlistment contract and separation from the military (deemed ineligible for retirement) with an honorable or general discharge.
- Must have been deployed during an OIF, OEF, or government-deemed hazardous mission after September 11, 2001.
- Must currently hold full-time employment, defining full-time as working at least 36 hours per week.

Yin (2014) asserted that purposive sampling raises terminological questions that mislead and give the notion of a quantitative generalization (p. 44). However, this research is a qualitative study that calls for more of a criterion-based selection where random sampling or a selection of a large number of participants is warranted. While the researcher tried to keep the population as diverse in demographics as possible, a limitation to the study was access to the availability of service members who fit the selection criteria. In addition, this raised the question of which and how many veterans

from each branch were selected. Although having an even number of veterans from each branch would have been ideal, the focus was on the individual learning experience during the transition, not the intricacies between each branch.

Veteran participants who were interviewed completed a demographic inventory that included their ethnicity/race, branch of military, age, gender, and level of education. The demographic inventory was drilled down as follows:

1. Ethnicity: 11 African Americans, one Hispanic participant, two Caucasians, and one Asian participant.
2. Branch of Military: five Army, three Air Force, four Navy, and three Coast Guardsmen.
3. Age: 13 participants who were 30-39 years of age; two participants who were 20-29 years of age.
4. Gender: 13 men and two women participants.
5. Level of education: two graduate degrees, five bachelor degrees, four some-college, and four participants with high school diplomas.

Table 3 presents a more descriptive summary of demographic information, including years of service and employment experience.

Focus Group

The six qualified focus group interview participants were comprised of Army veterans. They included four females and two males, of which four were White/Caucasian and two were African American. Focus group participants met the same criteria as the participants. They were used to confirm and supplement the data as

Table 3

Participant Demographic Data

Pseudonym	Branch	Age	Gender	Race	Joining Reason	Military Service	Degree	MOS	Current Employment
Rheuben O'Neal	Army	20-30	Male	Black	A,F	6 years	HS Diploma	Logistics	Retail
Mark Jackson	Navy	30-40	Male	Black	E	5 years	Bachelors	Corpsman	Finance
John Curry	Navy	30-40	Male	Black	B, F	10 years	HS Diploma	Mechanic	Woodcrafter
Jason Barnes	Coast Guard	30-40	Male	Hispanic	A,B,E	9 years	HS Diploma	Electrician	Maintenance Manager
Averre Jordan	Air Force	30-40	Male	Black	D	7 years	Bachelors	Logistics	Sales
Jeremy Bogues	Air Force	30-40	Male	Black	D	6 years	Bachelors	Vehicle Ops	Human Resources
Cody Haywood	Army	30-40	Male	White	C	7 years	HS Diploma	Administration	Employee Benefits (HR)
Tyrone Korver	Navy	30-40	Male	Black	F	4 years	Masters	Engineman	Human Resources
Elliott Davis	Coast Guard	30-40	Male	Black	B	4 years	Bachelors	Cook	Real Estate Agent
Casey Kukoc	Coast Guard	30-40	Male	Asian	A,B,C	9 years	HS Diploma	Gunners mate	Police Officer
Abdul Scott	Army	20-30	Male	White	A,D,F	3 years	HS Diploma	Engineer	Counseling & Education
Anthony Wallace	Navy	30-40	Male	Black	E	6 years	HS Diploma	Aviation	Cable TV Technician
Lisa Roberts	Air Force	30-40	Female	Black	B	6 years	Masters	Food Services	Teacher
Lebron Fisher	Army	30-40	Male	Black	B	6 years	Bachelors	Mechanic	Law Enforcement
Cheryl Staley	Army	30-40	Female	Black	D	4 years	HS Diploma	Administration	Finance

**MOS means Military Occupation Specialty. Joining reason was as follows: A-serve your country; B-education benefits; C-enjoys military job/field; D-family tradition; E-travel; F-other

described from the individual interview participants. See Table 4 for a more descriptive demographic breakdown.

Table 4

Focus Group Demographic Data

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Race	Joining Reason	Military Service	Degree	MOS	Current Employment
Jaime	20-30	Female	White	A	8 years	Bachelors	Construction Operations	Human Resources
Linda	30-40	Female	Black	F	7 years	HS Dip	Human Resources	Education Technician
Kara	30-40	Female	White	A	8 years	Masters	Aviation Operations	Human Resources
Kevin	40-50	Male	Black	A	8 years	Masters	Human Resources	Human Resources
Brian	40-50	Male	White	A,B,C,D	10 years	HS Dip	Human Resources	Human Resources
Kelly	20-30	Female	White	A,B,C,D	7 years	Masters	Human Resources	Human Resources

**MOS means Military Occupation Specialty. Joining reason was as follows, A-serve your country; B-education benefits; C-enjoys military job/field; D-family tradition; E-travel; F-other

Methods for Assuring Protection of Human Subjects

To ensure human subject protection, none of the participants' real names were used on any publications of this research. The researcher coded each participant to ensure that all personally identifiable information would not be compromised during any phase of this qualitative inquiry. The research provided a comfortable and private space for interviewing and reflection according to the participants' request. In addition, any information related to or involving a confidential military operation was omitted from this research.

Proper protocol was followed in the handling of participants' personal information, as specified by IRB requirements for collecting data. The researcher met all

requirements prior to collecting data, in which the human subjects' protection for IRB completion date was February, 2017.

Research Methods for Data Collection

To address the problem statement and research questions fully, the use of interviews and a focus group was the most advantageous option since an exploratory study tends to produce an overall improved quality in the findings and is more accurate than those relying on one source (Yin, 2014). In addition, it gave the researcher an opportunity to address a broader range of social and contextual issues. This study included the following data collection methods: interviews, follow-up interviews for clarification (if needed), and a focus group of different participants. The researcher gathered data from these sources with the intent to converge the lines of inquiry to strengthen the validity and reliability of the findings.

Demographic Inventory

The demographic inventory was used to collect descriptive data including age, race, ethnicity, contact information, marital status, children, professional roles, academic and military education, and military background information.

Interview

Yin (2014) noted that interviews are one of the most important sources of data collected. In-depth individual interviews were used to capture the learning experiences of military veterans as they transitioned from active duty to the civilian workforce. Moreover, the purpose of using in-depth individual interviews was to explain, differentiate, and validate the types of learning that took place during reintegration. The

study targeted 15 veterans for individual semi-structured interviews to provide a flexible environment for participants to speak freely while also having topical predetermined questions during the dialogue. Robson (2002) referred to King's (1994) work on semi-structured interviews and how this type of qualitative research is appropriate when a researcher is focusing on the meaning making of some particular phenomena by the participants (p. 271). In this case, the phenomenon is the learning that takes places during the transition process for veterans.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face and via phone because they gave the researcher the possibility of modifying one's line of inquiry, immediate action in following up on responses, and an opportunity to investigate underlying meaning in ways other communicative means would not allow. The standard interview was 45-90 minutes long at a location that was convenient but disturbance-free for each participant. All individual interactions used an interview protocol that was guided by Creswell's (2007) straightforward recommendations of having a proper heading and instructions for the interviewer to follow so that standard procedures are used from one interview to another. The researcher listed questions involving the qualitative research being conducted, along with concluding statements and probing questions. This allowed the interviewer to have specific explanations or clarifications on experiences they have had.

With the participants' consent, all interviews were tape recorded, and detailed notes and after-interview reflections from the researcher and participant were taken. The researcher thanked the interviewees for their time and input for this study. The tape-recorded interviews were sent out for professional transcription; the researcher then open-

coded and analyzed the transcripts using Dedoose online coding software. The exact interview protocol questions can be found in Appendix C.

Focus Group

A second set of six veterans was chosen for a focus group to share their views on the emergent themes from the individual interviews and several broad questions about their experiences and overall successes during their transition. Veterans fit the same criteria as the original study sample to ensure the reliability of data. The researcher was in a facilitator role to ensure that the conversation stayed within the initial agreed-upon boundaries and helped the dialogue of the group flow effectively (Robson, 2002). This 90-minute focus group was tape-recorded with the participants' consent and sent off for professional transcription.

Methods for Data Analysis and Synthesis

Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals attribute to a human or social problem, so how the analysis of data is conducted should inform and be informed by the design of the research (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2005). Such analysis, as described by Creswell (2007), involves first preparing the data for analysis, moving more and more deeply into understanding the data, representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data. Additionally, when the researcher is working with multiple levels of data analysis, following steps from the specific to the general can be a preferred method for ensuring validity.

In general, the researcher was guided by the concurrent streams of interaction throughout the analysis, as defined by Miles and Huberman (1994), that entail data reduction, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. Data reduction is a constant process throughout the analysis with the goal of trying to delineate, manage, and extract the most important information. Moreover, it is a process to reduce the amount of data without significant loss of information obtained from the interviews. The researcher started this process when deciding on who and where to interview her participants. A demographic inventory was sent out via Survey Monkey and, upon applicant completions, was automatically organized in a Google spreadsheet by the number of surveys sent out; respondent or demographic information was obtained before the individual interview started. Additionally, the software sorted the list of potential interviewees who met the specific requirements of having at least one military deployment after 2001 in a war zone, being separated (never retired) with less than 10 years of active duty service, and being currently employed full-time after assigning numbers to each applicant. Reduction of data continued in the coding process as themes and patterns emerged from the interviews and focus group.

Punch (1998) described coding as tags, names, or labels, and coding is therefore the process of putting tags, names, or labels against pieces of data (p. 176). The coding used for this research was both descriptive and inferential, with the purpose of collecting data with substantial analysis going on simultaneously (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Miles & Huberman 1994). Descriptive codes are broad labels attached to the beginning of the data collected and serve as building blocks for additional data development. Better known as first-level coding, this allowed the researcher to summarize the data. Inferential

codes are known as second-level coding and attach more meaningful labels and patterns to the data as the reduction of data continues.

Miles and Huberman (1994) argued that data displays organize and give meaning to the research and serve as another way to reduce information. With the use of networks, matrices, and diagrams, the researcher converted large amounts of qualitative data into visual form to better understand the connotations of the responses and make substantiated conclusions. The researcher then drew and verified conclusions throughout the process to find patterns and themes. Additional tactics of drawing conclusions were also utilized as applicable, including looking for plausibility, clustering, making metaphors, counting, making contrasts and comparisons, partitioning variables, subsuming particulars into the general, factoring, findings no relations between variables, building a logical chain of evidence, and making conceptual/theoretical coherence (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Punch (1998) summarized the drawing of conclusions in exploratory studies by saying that this should be happening throughout the research, with editing, segmenting, summarizing, conceptualizing, and then explaining the data.

The researcher kept a journal to keep track of memos, analytical notes, and any other reflective processes for analysis. Also, the journal included interactions with participants, including body language and meaning making that might otherwise not show up in the interview coding. Comparative methods were used with the researcher's journal, codes, categories, and any new information obtained during the analysis to reduce data and discover emergent themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After collecting and reducing the data, creating data displays, and drawing and verifying conclusions, the

researcher summarized the information into a meaningful written report, taking the reader to the specific instances of the phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Figure 4 is a visual representation of the data analysis progression that flowed throughout the research, with each stage influencing the next one.

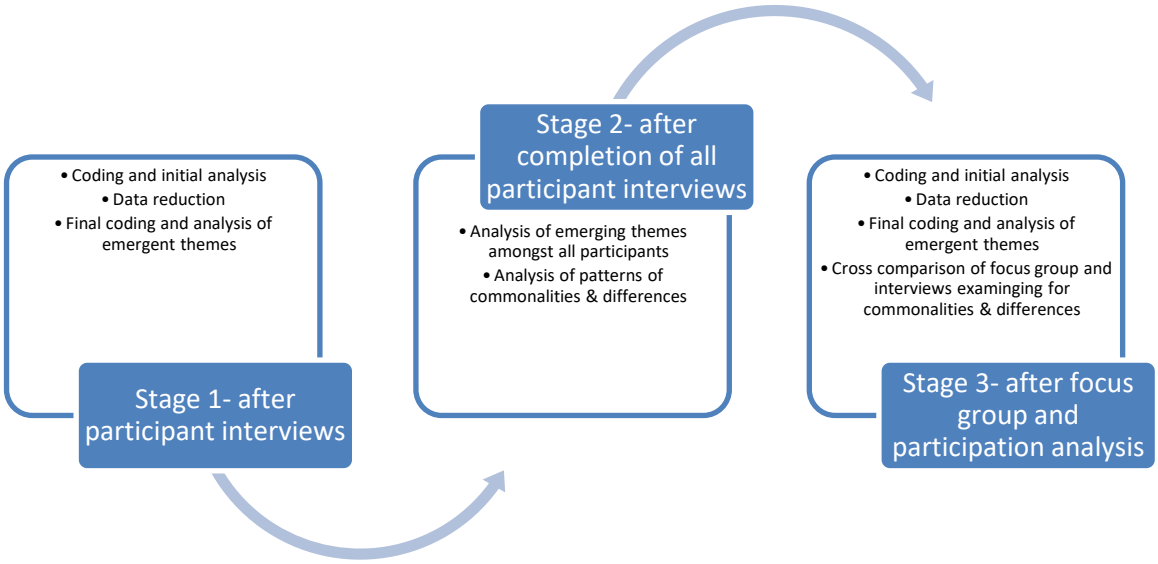

Figure 4. Data analysis progression

Rationale for Methods Selection

Qualitative methodologies were selected because they offer "the potential for making a significant contribution to the field" and are most appropriate for research exploring learning experiences during the transition of military veterans (Merriam, 2001, p. 165).

Robson (2002) discussed how Miles and Huberman's approach provided an invaluable general framework for conceptualizing qualitative data analysis, specifically with the use of interviews in a study. Conducting an exploratory study using interviews

allowed the participants to provide their perspectives of the transition process and speak openly about what they deemed meaningful. Moreover, exploratory interviews were chosen because "philosophically, their position is firmly entrenched in realism, hence permitting a consistency of the realist view through from design to analysis" (p. 473).

Similar to the interviews, the focus group can provide a space where participants can discuss their meaning making in addition to using group interactions to produce alternate understandings that may not derive from one-on-one communications. Using a second group of participants can enhance the credibility of the findings by corroborating the data from the interviews (Yin, 2014).

Data Validity and Reliability

Validity is generally defined as the quality of how factually sound or credible the science of reasoning is in a body of research. Moreover, validity is used in research to address issues of trustworthiness by performing a series of tests to minimize biases and errors. To address potential validity issues, the researcher used two sources to compile data including interviews and a focus group. Using more than one data methodology helped to strengthen the construct validity, as recommended by Yin (2014) who asserted that multiple sources of evidence provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon (p. 121). Reliability is a validity test that seeks to demonstrate a standard of the operations in a study for future researchers to replicate the process to produce the same findings; however, its origin fits a quantitative approach whereas this research was qualitative and constructivist. Maxwell (2005) stated, "Although methods and procedures do not guarantee validity, they are nonetheless essential to the process of ruling out

validity threats and increasing the credibility of your conclusions" (p. 109). Moreover, Guba and Lincoln (1994) used the terminology "credibility," "dependability," "confirmability," and "transferability" as criteria to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research (p. 327).

Credibility

In establishing credibility, the researcher intentionally incorporated strategies of consistency during the study to ensure reliability of the data. The criterion of credibility suggests whether the findings are accurate and credible from the standpoint of the researcher, participants, and the reader (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Data strategies included using multiple sources of data and reflections that are viewed from the researcher's personal assumptions of working in military education leadership, as documented in Chapter I. Additionally, in establishing credibility, the researcher used her dissertation advisors and doctoral peers to provide professional input. They helped to analyze the researcher's thinking and processes and serve as an additional set of eyes (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Dependability

Addressing dependability in research involves tracking processes and procedures to ensure consistency and to be mindful if inconsistencies occur (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The researcher kept a journal reflecting on all of the processes and major decisions, with the goal of making the results more trustworthy. Additionally, by making the results more dependable, the researcher is better able to follow the trail of steps and inquiry involved in the research and analysis of data in a chronological way (Bloomberg

& Volpe, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The trail of steps included: demographic forms, interviews, field notes, transcription, and an overall journal of the research.

Confirmability

Objectivity is the framework to establishing confirmability in a qualitative research study. To maximize confirmability, the researcher used an audit trail to demonstrate dependability and included field notes/transcripts and journaling for ongoing reflections as a way to assess the findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). In addition to audit trails, the researcher disclosed her background in military education and current leadership position in education services for the U.S. Army to ensure research biases were minimized from the lens used to view this study.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which a particular research in a particular context can transfer to another context (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Typically, transferability is applied by the readers of the study so the researcher can provide a rich, thick description of the participants and the context to aid them in visualizing application to other populations. Miller and Creswell (2000) described rich, thick descriptions as "verisimilitude, statements that produce for the readers the feeling they have experienced or could have experienced the events being described in the study" (p. 129). Moreover, shared characteristics can potentially be derived from using any common themes from the exploratory study, based on the conceptual framework of the experiences of enlisted military personnel transitioning from active duty to the civilian workforce. Additionally,

using more than one source of data served to strengthen not only its validity but also its applicability to other research contexts (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Research Limitations

The participants of this research were selected by availability from several sources who met the selected criteria that may not have been diverse in racial or gender backgrounds. Each participant brought his or her own perspectives of the reintegration process, and a multitude of broad contexts was encouraged to expand the findings and, ultimately, the knowledge base on these types of experiences. However, interpretations of these experiences varied because they were based off what the participants could remember or what they chose to share with the researcher. Another limitation of this study regarding the pool of applicants was the potential for a broader pool of participants. The researcher used her military networks to assist with obtaining additional participants, but there was no timeframe or guarantee for when additional participants would be available.

Lastly, another limitation was the researcher's direct involvement with the field of research in which the study was situated. The researcher assumed that because of her current work position, participants would be more forthcoming in relating their personal experiences of transition. While the researcher recognized all limitations could not be foreseen, all additional restraints that arose were minimized.

Chapter IV

FINDINGS

In addressing the purpose of this qualitative research to describe the learning experiences of enlisted military veterans when they transitioned from active duty to the civilian workforce, the researcher contacted 22 veterans to be interviewed on their lived experiences of such transition. Of the 22 contacted, only 15 met all of the criteria of being a military veteran from one of the five U.S. military branches, a separated veteran (with an honorable or general discharge), deployed at least one time after September 11, 2001, and currently holding full-time employment. Fifteen veterans agreed to have an in-person or telephonic interview with the researcher. All of the individual interviews lasted between 40 and 90 minutes. Pseudonyms were used to identify all participants to ensure confidentiality during the research. All of the interviews were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed. In addition, the researcher included data from a focus group as a collective voice from veterans who met the same criteria as the individually interviewed participants and were a part of the study.

This chapter presents the major findings from the four research questions that guided the interviews with the goal of understanding a real-life phenomenon (Yin, 2014):

1. How do veterans describe their transition from active duty to the civilian workforce?

2. What type of resources were utilized by veterans to assist with their transition to the civilian workforce?
3. What challenges do veterans experience during their transition from active duty to the civilian workforce?
4. What personal and professional influences do veterans describe as an advantage during the reintegration process?

The major findings from this research included:

Finding 1: The majority of veterans described that they needed to be self-directed when they transitioned because they had limited support from their military leadership.

Finding 2: The veterans indicated that the military TAP class was the most helpful resource when they transitioned, but it needed major changes so they used their experiences obtained from the military to aid in transition.

Finding 3: The vast majority of veterans reported having challenges with their civilian employers when they transitioned out of the military.

Finding 4: The veterans described a battle buddy and family members as positive influences in helping them transition to the civilian world.

Participant profiles were categorized into two groups: unanticipated and anticipated transitioned veterans. The two qualitative groups were based on participants' account of having a planned or unplanned military transition to the civilian workforce. They were derived from the literature review on career transitions and its implications to the military population. The literature delineated that the first step in understanding transitions is to identify what type of transition the participant is experiencing (Anderson

et al., 2012). From the 15 participants, nine were unanticipated transitioned veterans and six were anticipated transitioned veterans. In Chapter V, a delineation of the two analytic categories is discussed, along with the rationale for using them in this research.

Participant Profiles

The final sample included 15 veterans representing the U.S. Army, U.S. Air Force, U.S. Coast Guard, and the U.S. Navy. It consisted of five Army, three Air Force, four Navy, and three Coast Guardsmen. The researcher did not have access to any veteran Marines who fit the research criteria. Their military ranks ranged from E4 to E6 across the four military branches. The ranks of E4 to E6 are the enlisted insignias service members earn and wear on their military uniform that signify their level of responsibility in their respective branch. In this research, the majority of the participants were men because they were easily accessible and fit all of the research criteria. In total, there were two females and 13 male participants.

Below are brief profiles to give context for each participant according to the overarching research question of how enlisted veterans experience transition after leaving active duty and going into the civilian workforce.

Rheuben O'Neal

African American Male, Military Job-Supply/Logistics
6-year ARMY Veteran
20-30 years of age

Rheuben was the youngest of all of the participants and had six different jobs after separation from the military before finding one full-time position. Ultimately, when he got out of the military, he did not feel confident about it; however, he wanted to leave because

he got tired of fighting the "good ole boys" system. He worked in fast food, retail, and casual dining restaurants before settling into a career in the automotive industry.

Rheuben joined the military right out of high school to get away from home and expressed how much the military has matured him. He completed 12 college credits but was not able to complete more as his military leadership was not supportive of him taking college classes because of his odd work hours.

Mark Jackson

African American Male, Military Job-Hospital Corpsman
5-year NAVY Veteran
30-40 years of age

Mark was a hospital corpsman who explained that he found difficulty finding employment in the civilian sector in a similar field. He had four jobs after separating from the Navy, but none of them were in the medical field although three were full-time. He later decided to go into the field of economics and finance as he felt that challenged him.

Upon separation from the NAVY, Mark decided to use his GI Bill benefits and completed his Bachelor's degree in Economics. Mark stated college was a waste of time because he felt it catered to young adults who had no life experience. However, it was the best option for him because the Navy did not provide him with a clear path or room for advancement.

John Curry

African American Male, Military Job-Boatswain Mate (Crewman on a Boat)
10-year NAVY Veteran
30-40 years of age

John was a part of the veteran population that was forced to separate from service due to cutbacks in his specific job and overmanning issues with the Navy. He has had

two jobs after separation, neither full-time. He expressed feeling "behind the curve" because he received a 1-year advisement of the Navy's decision, but thought he needed at least 2 years to properly prepare himself and his family for the transition. Overall, he felt that his leadership did not support him because they never had answers to his transition questions or were helpful in finding the resources he needed.

One of the main reasons John joined the military was to use the education benefits and thought the Navy was supportive of sailors attending college classes, but it was still always work first. He found the balance to be challenging while he was in, so he focused on work but never finished a college degree or certification while active duty.

Jason Barnes

Caucasian Male, Military Job-Electrician
9-year COAST GUARD Veteran
30-40 years of age

Jason joined the Coast Guard post-September 11, 2001 to serve his country and he also felt like he needed the structure the military provided. In general, he stated he loved serving and being in the Coast Guard but did not feel valued by his military leadership. He was upset that after his voluntary deployments and advanced rank, his leadership did not give him consideration when it was time to pick a duty station to be close to his family.

He attended all of the military schools within his military occupation to include electrician, HVAC, maintenance, and any other related course they would allow him to attend because he enjoyed working with his hands. He was never interested in traditional college, so he never utilized the education benefits. He had four different jobs post-military and three of them were full-time.

Averre Jordan

African American Male, Military Job-Logistics (Vehicle Operations)
7-year AIR FORCE Veteran
30-40 years of age

Averre had six different full-time jobs after he separated from the military but was not what he wanted to do, so he used his GI Bill benefits to obtain multiple certifications and degrees and worked as a full-time chef, massage therapist, truck driver, entrepreneur, and salesman. He did not complete any college classes while in the military but finished two Associate degrees and a Bachelor's degree post-separation.

Averre expressed that he was getting tired of the military lifestyle; although they taught him some useful skills, he wanted to work in the civilian sector.

Jeremy Bogues

African American Male, Military Job-Logistics (Vehicle Operations-Dispatcher)
6-year AIR FORCE Veteran
30-40 years of age

Jeremy decided to join the military because it was a family tradition, but upon enlisting in the Air Force, he knew this was something he did not want to do forever. He decided to get out after his first deployment because he wanted to start a family and did not feel support from his unit. He utilized his family members as a main support system to assist him with finding employment in a different industry than his military job. He worked five full-time jobs before settling into a full-time job in Human Resources.

He never thought he wanted to attend college, but after separating from the military he felt a degree would help him find a second career. Ultimately, he ended up completing his Bachelor's degree in Human Resources a few years after separating from the military.

Cody Haywood

Caucasian Male, Military Job-Administration
7-year ARMY Veteran
30-40 years of age

Cody joined the military to serve his country and take advantage of the military education programs, but feels embarrassed that he never used the education benefits. In general, he believed that the Army offers many good education and transition programs, but they are so disjointed that soldiers have a hard time navigating to find out about them or apply for them.

After coming off active duty, Cody found a civilian job in the state where he lived, but decided to stay an Army reservist because he loves the sense of family and unity the military provides. Cody had three civilian jobs after separating from active duty. He described the civilian work sector as cold, compared with the military lifestyle.

Tyrone Korver

African American Male, Military Job-Engineman (on a boat)
4-year NAVY Veteran
30-40 years of age

Tyrone joined the Navy after completing his Bachelor's degree. He expressed having trouble finding a job after graduating college and liked the military's structure that would provide steady employment. After 4 years and multiple deployments, he decided to get out and pursue his Master's degree for a higher earning potential in the civilian work sector. Although he had a plan when he got out with an alternate career and pursue graduate education, he encountered difficulty when he got laid off from the civilian position. He kept full-time employment by going through a temporary career agency, but

he knew it was not a guaranteed job. After he completed his Master's degree, he enlisted back into the military because of the stability it offered for his family.

Elliott Davis

African American Male, Military Job-Food Service
4-year COAST GUARD Veteran
30-40 years of age

Elliott joined the military with a Bachelor's degree because he had troubles with finding a career post-graduation. He enjoyed his military career but separated because he did not feel challenged and did not want to live the military lifestyle anymore. When he separated, he felt he was not properly prepared for the civilian world emotionally or financially. After separation, he had trouble finding a job but had a good support system to help him as he went through five different jobs. After settling into a career in real estate, he decided to use his GI Bill education benefits to pursue his Master's degree.

Elliott expressed not having a supportive leadership when he was transitioning to the civilian sector and had to do most things by himself because everyone thought he was making a bad decision. He enjoyed his job in the Coast Guard but did not feel there was a lot of room for growth in his career field or as a person.

Casey Kukoc

Asian Male, Military Job-Gunnersmate (Law Enforcement)
9-year US COAST GUARD Veteran
30-40 years of age

Casey left the military on a hardship because of a death in the family and luckily found a job immediately after separation. He was having family issues the year he

separated and had applied for law enforcement jobs in the civilian sector in the event he needed to be local full-time. He knew it was a risk to leave the stability of his military job with a mortgage, wife, and kids without guaranteed employment, but felt it was worth it for his family long-term. His military unit and leadership were very supportive but his separation from the military was abrupt, so Casey missed out on obtaining a lot of transition information that service members receive during separation.

Although he did not complete a college degree, Casey is happy that his wife was able to use his education benefits to further her education and career goals.

Abdul Scott

Caucasian Male, Military Job-Army Engineer
3-year ARMY Veteran
20-30 years of age

Abdul regrets not using his military education benefits while he was on active duty because he felt if he had taken college seriously, he would not have experienced so many issues with finding a job when he came back from deployment. He noted that an unstable economy also led him to work seven different jobs, but he had a supportive family to help him along the way. Abdul decided to stay in the military by going into the Reserves and ultimately became a part-time Blackhawk pilot. He loves the comrade of the military and found a full-time civilian job working on a military base.

Post-separation from active duty, he started working on his Bachelor's degree again while balancing his full-time civilian job working for the Army.

Anthony Wallace

African American Male, Military Job-Electronics Specialist
6-year NAVY Veteran
30-40 years of age

Anthony described having a very supportive leadership when it came to using military education benefits, but he was never sure if college was for him. He loved being in the military, but after he had his daughter, he did not want to be away from her for long periods of time due to deployments and frequent changes of home stations. After he separated from the military, he worked three different full-time jobs and found it challenging to adjust because he was accustomed to the military's structured lifestyle. He credited family as big supporters with helping him with the groundwork of finding employment and pointing him in the right direction.

After separating from the military, Anthony wished he had taken advantage of the benefits because he neglected to use so many opportunities. He explained that he tried a couple times to rejoin the Navy as a Reservist, but found challenges trying to come in at the same rank, so he decided to stay a full-time civilian.

Lisa Roberts

African American Female, Military Job-Food Services
6-year ARMY Veteran
30-40 years of age

Lisa joined the Army solely to use the education benefits so she does not go into debt paying for her Bachelor's degree. After her first deployment, she decided to separate from the military because she did not want to be deployed "as a lifestyle." She made sure to complete her Bachelor's degree before separating from the military. Lisa had five jobs

post-military and, although three of them were full-time, she stated she "never wanted for anything."

Lisa credits one of her battle buddies for giving her information on a teaching program in her home state, where she now works full-time and loves helping kids.

Lebron Fisher

African American Male, Military Job-Mechanic
6-year ARMY Veteran
30-40 years of age

Lebron joined the military with a plan to have the military pay for his Bachelor's degree and separate upon completion of his contract. He used all of the education benefits offered to him and completed his Bachelor's degree earlier than expected. He loved the military brotherhood but after graduating and deploying multiple times, he decided to separate. He reported not having any challenges with separating as it was a part of his plan from the beginning, but he did miss the military lifestyle.

Lebron reported having two different jobs post-military and credited a battle buddy for advising him to enroll in a local law enforcement academy, where he now serves in a full-time position.

Cheryl Staley

African American Female, Military Job-Administration
4-year ARMY Veteran
30-40 years of age

Cheryl enlisted in the military because it was a family tradition and she wanted to serve her country. She enjoyed the military experience but felt like the structure of the military was not for her, so she separated after her first deployment.

Cheryl had six different jobs after separating from the military and reported having a difficult transition as far as finding employment and being counseled about any veterans' benefits that could have assisted her.

Finding 1: Conceptualization of Transition Experience

Veterans were initially asked how they described their transition from active duty to the civilian workforce to understand how they conceptualized separating from the military. Ten participants (67%) reported a lack of support from their military leadership when they were transitioning, in terms of preparing for civilian life or employment and pointing them in the right direction for helpful resources. They expressed not having clear guidance on what needed to be done to transition successfully and having uncertainty about their future as a civilian. Moreover, the lack of support from leadership made the process of transitioning more challenging in that they had to do much of it on their own. Second, because they had to do much of the transition process on their own, the need to be self-directed (87%) was a common finding among most of the veterans who believed they had to do everything independently, whether the military leadership supported them or not. Figure 5 below outlines the conceptualization of transition experience.

Limited Support From Leadership

The first element of this finding is that veterans believed they received limited support from their military leadership when they were transitioning out of the military and into the civilian workforce. In John's experience, he expressed that his leadership did not have time to really focus on him because they were "losing a body." A similar expression was echoed by Tyrone when he was separating but phrased as "next man up."

Finding #1: Conceptualization of Transition Experience

Majority of participants (87%) indicated that because their military leadership did not provide adequate support when they were transitioning they had to be self-directed in their learning. Veterans stated that their leadership's limited support impeded their progress when transitioning to the civilian world.

Veterans described their conceptualization of transitioning as follows:

Limited Support from Leadership (10 of 15, 67%)

- Feelings of uncertainty
- Feelings of no one cares about veterans transitioning

Need to be Self-Directed (13 of 15, 87%)

- Culture shock
- Being proactive

Figure 5. Finding #1 Outline

In both instances, John and Tyrone described telling their leadership that they were not going to re-enlist and immediately events were put into action about finding someone to replace them and for them to keep pushing in their job rather than worry about transitioning to civilian life.

Feelings of uncertainty. Other veterans felt similarly in that receiving guidance on military career advancement was not clear so they did not have faith in their leadership's guidance in other areas. Mark expressed that he loved being in the military, but the main reason he got out was because there was never any clear direction about his future in the military or when he should decide to transition. He explained:

> Nobody could give me a clear path as far as career advancement, I knew E5 was something that I was probably going to do. E6, petty officer first class, second class, but I was looking for a little bit more clear direction. I'm asking my

> leadership, how do you become a chief E7 rank? And I couldn't really get any solid advice or direction regarding that. So, I decided to separate and started a little over a year out preparing for civilian life because I felt if they couldn't help me promote, how were they going to prepare me for a life they never experienced.

Mark's response was similar in that he felt his leadership was not providing any direction for him when he decided to separate and they had a "catch me if you can" mentality. His response to describing his transition regarding leadership was to send him an email. It was beneficial for them because they were busy, but Mark described it as a challenge trying to receive counseling via email about transitioning to the civilian sector. From there, he felt he had to do everything on his own if he wanted to have a successful transition. While Mark perceived an email as minimal, Jeremy's experience was nonexistent in his view of help from his military leadership when transitioning.

Jeremy explained how when he was transitioning, everyone in his unit (department) was deployed so his work hours were stretched and he did not have anyone to advise him before he separated. He explained how he sought leadership from other units, but no one could direct him and he felt he had to do everything on his own. He summed it up as follows:

> As far as the military goes, no one helped me. Maybe because they weren't there and the people that were just didn't know. They hadn't experienced transitioning so I felt like that's why they couldn't give me any real advice. Perhaps, because they are still in and you don't know, what you don't know. But that shouldn't be an excuse, we should have trained leaders that mentor younger Airmen and serve as a role model. Let them know that there is no limit and anything you don't know, at least provide the resources for them to get the information. I probably could have been further along.

Sixty-seven percent of the participants perceived that their leadership was not supportive when they were transitioning out of the military and believed their transition would have been smoother if they had more assistance from them. John stated that

whenever he asked a question, people continued to refer him to wait until the TAP class. From his perspective, it did not make much sense that one week of "information overload" would assist him in making an entire life change. He expressed finding value in the TAP class once he went, but still needed further guidance because his forced separation was only months away. Even with TAP class, John was still concerned about taking the proper steps when transitioning out and felt that if he did not ask the right questions, he would never know because "nobody was dropping anything in his lap."

Feelings of no one cares about our transition. John followed up with the example of how he randomly asked the right question because of a conversation with one of his friends who separated before him and how it could have affected his transition into civilian life:

> There was a chance I probably wasn't even going to get compensation pay unless I asked about it. This was due to the NAVY's force reduction and pushing me out with all of my years of service. I thought that was something that I automatically get based off the time that I had in the military and no prior incidences on my record. I thought that was something they just gave me, but come to find out I had to go ahead and put in all this paperwork. Sign up as far as inactive reserve, all these things I had to do in order for me to get that compensation pay because the way the NAVY would have worked it, if I'd never asked about it I would have got out the military and I would have had no compensation pay whatsoever. So, pretty much having those things in order was pretty much my biggest challenge.

Jason expressed not having any guidance from his leadership when transitioning and TAP class was suggested, recommended by some but not mandatory for him to complete before separating. He explained his situation as being discharged and having only 30 days to prepare for civilian life so he never got the opportunity to attend TAP. He felt that his leadership should have assisted with getting him in that class because it could have given him tools to help him be more successful in the civilian work sector. Jason

added that he had feelings of discontentment towards his leadership because of the reasons surrounding his decision to leave and that was a determining factor in him not receiving any help when he transitioned. Rheuben shared his experience and felt that his leadership had a vendetta against him. The two bases he was stationed at were in Texas and North Carolina and his perception was of a "good ole boys" system in place that only wanted to help their own. As he stated, "I'm not going to say race was involved but it is what it is." Rheuben went on to say, "You join the military to serve your country, travel, and for the brotherhood and if soldiers don't trust each other then they have nothing." Elliott had similar feelings of discontentment with his leadership and expressed that was one of the main reasons why he did not get much help transitioning. He recalled his experience with a military leader:

> I think the problem is my supervisor was another chef. So the first thing is, you know, it's this feeling of maybe he thinks he's better than us or maybe something's wrong with what we're doing. It's more of an insult as opposed to I want to help you be happy when you get out. So I think maybe that should be something that falls on the officer's side of it. They should be responsible for coming in because you're brining in a third party and is not so personal. If your supervisor is telling you, you should stay here and you're like, "I don't want to do this," he could take it the wrong way. In my situation, he felt like I had a problem with what he does and that I thought I was better than him because I didn't have aspirations to be where he is currently in his career. You think that guy helped me transition? Absolutely not!

Lisa also expressed that the leadership should do more when one transitions out. She added, "This is the reason why our country has so many homeless veterans. Once you get out, it's like 'fuck you' and figure all this shit out on your own." Cheryl explained it as "one day you're in and the next day you're out and nobody is there to save you." She noted that it can really take a toll on a veteran who has sacrificed a lot for his

or her country. Rheuben also echoed this by sharing how much his family supported him when his leadership did not:

> My family actually played a big role in me getting out successfully. Just as far as trying to keep me sane because it takes a toll on you mentally. It naturally leads to some thoughts of depression and things like that, because when you're transitioning out, they don't care that you're depressed or anything like that. They just care about, "Hey, get him off the books, he done, it's on him." You know, they don't really care if you have a plan and stuff like that.

Need to Be Self-Directed

The second element of Finding #1 is that the participants needed to be self-directed. All but two of the participants (86.6%) described their experience transitioning as having to become self-directed to acclimate successfully (by their standard) into the civilian work sector. The veterans were accustomed to the military lifestyle that provided all the answers for how they were supposed to work, live, and conduct themselves while in service. For some, once they transitioned, they had a feeling of being "back at square one" when they got out because they had no place to live or any leads on employment opportunities. Deriving from a lack of leadership support and being proactive, the veterans conceptualized that they needed to be deliberate in learning how to transition. Jeremy noted that he got to where he is today by just "bouncing from one area to another, asking people who had gotten out what resources did they use to help them." Mark explained how he figured out what to do after working in the medical field in the military by getting into finance after he separated:

> It was just my own research honestly. I was deciding between three different cities and looking at the cost of living and college costs. It wasn't necessarily the school. At that time, I wasn't really aware of the difference between education reputations and different stuff like that, so that wasn't the forefront of my mind. The forefront of my mind was how am I going to support myself.

Culture shock. Jason's reality was comparable because his perception was that it was a huge cultural change for veterans. He elaborated on the cultural change by saying, "You have to learn a lot of new things that you never needed before in the military." He said he never wrote a resume before and did not know how to present himself in an interview or what to wear to an interview to ensure he would have the best chance of getting the job. In this words, the whole process was new territory that he had to learn all on his own.

The service members were used to structure when they were active duty and felt it provided all the tools necessary to complete the job or task at hand. John discussed that although service members should have help from their leadership, it was on the members to find out what information they can. As a married man with kids, John felt it was solely on him to ensure he provided for his family post-military. He was motivated by his family and obtained as much information as possible before transitioning to ensure he could take care of them. All of the veterans expressed calling toll-free numbers, researching different benefits online, or reaching out to prior service members for assistance with getting help on what they needed to transition. Elliot explained how he did a lot of reading on his own which helped him be in a better place.

> I reached out to a lot of people that I look up and admire. And I spent a lot of time by myself, you know, and was forced to deal with myself and think about who I want to be. And then I guess the biggest jump was taking action on that stuff, you know? Like you start thinking differently. Like all right, how do I put this into play? And you give up on the idea that someone's going come and save you and all your problems are going to be solved overnight. And it's like I have to take baby steps today and practice certain habits so when it does come I'll be ready for it. But it doesn't happen overnight, it happens one day at a time. And just getting up every day and trying and pushing harder. And you just start building momentum. And you slowly but surely get in a better place mentally. I got in a better place mentally and I could start working on things.

Being proactive. Tyrone concurred with Elliot, expressing how he attended many civilian career fairs and reached out to people he knew outside the military for assistance. He did not feel that waiting for someone to help him would put his resume in the right hands, so he had to be proactive about it. Additionally, he credited his faith in God as motivating him to know that a break in finding a job would come through. Rheuben was also motivated by his faith in God and shared that his church provided many networks for employment, military resources (veterans attending the church), and connections on where he could find a place to live. Cheryl had a relatable story of using her faith to be self-directed because she felt she was leaving high school for the "real world" again when she transitioned out. Cheryl was young when she went into the military, so she went from her parents' structure to the military's structure, and now transitioning out was a culture shock for her. Without access to that structure anymore, she stated how she did not have any vision for her life and initially struggled. She explained how her parents did everything for her, so that was easy; then the military told her what to do and that made things doable. Thus, when she got out, she turned to her church and faith in God to help her find job opportunities and housing.

Some participants explained how they knew from the time they decided to get out that they would have to do everything on their own. Lisa phrased it as transitioning and doing things on her own, just as she had been raised to do. She said:

> I understood that I was in the military for the education benefits. That if I did a semester at school I would get my tuition paid for. I also understood that once I got out, all of those funds would no longer be available to me. I got out the military with my degree and no loans so I was already on the path of securing my future. Even though when I got out I still wasn't sure what I was going to do yet, because I didn't even become a teacher yet at that point. But I just knew, I got my degree so I have to do something with it. It's also a degree that doesn't have a

> bunch of loans weighing me down, so I definitely needed to make something happen.

Lisa went on to say that although she did not have the job she initially wanted when she got out, she knew what she had to do. Believing that it was just a matter of time before it happened, she was confident in her ability to be self-directed in transitioning. Jason explained how he discerned early on in his decision to transition that he always knew he would be okay even though he had to do everything on his own. He stated that his upbringing in a big city prepared him for doing things solo, but he was concerned about the young veterans who did not have his life experience—how would they figure out what resources would help them transition on their own?

As Mark said, "When you're doing everything on your own, you have to have a clear plan of what you want and what you're going to do." He believed that one will run into setbacks, but with a clear vision; a successful transition is inevitable. Other veterans had the same confidence when transitioning because they were not worried about where they were going to live or work but were just working the plan they had established for themselves. As Tyrone said, he assessed his situation and kept working until it came to fruition. He elaborated on his point by explaining how one has to be confident:

> Well, you have to be confident if you expect things to change, you know what I'm saying? I had no doubt that I would get a job. That wasn't the issue. When I would get a job and what the job would be in, that was probably the question mark. But…yeah, I had enough experience to know that I'd be getting a paycheck from somebody from somewhere, so I wasn't really concerned about that too much.

In sum, the conceptualization of the transition experience for veterans included feeling as though leadership provided limited support to them when they were

transitioning. Additionally, the veterans expressed having to be self-directed for most of the process.

Finding 2: Military Transition Resources

Participants were asked what were the most helpful resources in the military during their transition, how were they helpful, and how would they specifically describe their experience with this resource in relation to obtaining civilian employment. The majority of participants reported the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) class as the most helpful resource in assisting with their overall preparation for civilian employment. As well, those who did not attend still perceived it as beneficial and expressed either regret about not attending or acknowledged its potential advantages to veterans.

As discussed in Chapter II, the TAP class, although helpful for veterans, has been reported as insufficient because it did not provide enough information. An overwhelming majority of participants agreed with previous research found on TAP class inconsistencies. The ability to reflect on their military experience was another resource participants cited as beneficial to their transition. The veterans perceived their military experiences helped to prepare them better for the civilian world. Below, Figure 6 outlines the military transition resources.

Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Class

Eleven out of 15 participants attended the TAP class prior to separating from the military. The four participants who did not attend felt they should have attended as it may have helped them prepare better for civilian employment. Jason was one of the

Finding #2: Military Transition Resources

All participants expressed TAP (Transition Assistance Program) class as being beneficial to a veteran's transition, although not all of them attended. Moreover, all who attended indicated there needs to be changes to the program in order for it to truly be a successful transition program for veterans. All veterans expressed reflecting on their military experience and how what they learned while they were serving was a tangible or intangible resource for them when they transitioned.

Veterans described the most helpful resources when transitioning as:

TAP Class (11 of 15, 73%)

- Participants who did not attend TAP class
- Benefits of attending TAP class
- TAP class inadequacies and issues

Reflection on Military Experience (15 of 15, 100%)

- Military discipline and structure
- Ability to adapt to change

Figure 6. Finding #2 outline

participants who perceived himself as very self-directed in his transition but expressed his displeasure about not having the opportunity to go to TAP by saying:

> Who knows, that could've been a deal breaker between me being more successful in my career or meeting the right person who could help me along. What if there were tools in there that could've changed my life? I will never know because I wasn't granted the opportunity to go before separating.

Participants who did not attend TAP class. Cheryl was in a similar situation in that she departed from the military abruptly and never got the chance to attend TAP class. She explained her experience after returning from deployment as having little direction on separating out. She completed a medical exam, was given much paperwork with minimal instruction, heard an administrator express the importance of her DD214, and

then was discharged out a couple days later. No one ever mentioned a TAP class or what Cheryl needed to do to prepare for civilian employment. Casey separated from the military on a hardship and explained that everything happened so quickly, he did not know enough to ask nor did anyone recommend attending a TAP class. He acknowledged that he had put all of his hope into obtaining a civilian career in law enforcement and had it not worked out with him not receiving any guidance or direction from attending a TAP class, his transition would have been more challenging.

Abdul mentioned that when he transitioned after coming back from deployment, he just wanted to go home. He explained numerous briefings were offered but he wanted to go home and just be around his family. After struggling for a few years and trying to find a stable job, he regretted his decision of not attending TAP or taking advantage of other benefits. He noted that had he done so, his life might not be where it is now, which is "playing catch-up" in his career. Similarly, Lisa did not attend TAP class by her own doing, but unlike Abdul, she did not regret her decision. She said:

> The current administration [at that time] had military members deploying all the time. I wanted to serve my country but I came in for the education benefits. I didn't believe in what was going on politically, so I said fuck this shit, I'm out of here. I already had a plan and decided to make it work for me. The military was such a great experience for me in that I met a lot of wonderful people and learned a lot but I had to go.

Lisa went on to say that although she decided not to attend, there were benefits to attending a TAP class. She recognized that not everybody was prepared to transition as she was and the class could help young Air men and women be more knowledgeable about their veterans' benefits.

Benefits of TAP class. All participants (100%) who attended TAP when transitioning reported finding some value from the class. Additionally, they all went to

one TAP class that lasted for 5 days and covered the same transition topics. Jeremy explained how he learned everything about his veterans' benefits during the TAP class and how it would affect him in applying for government jobs. He said:

> Out of everything the most beneficial was my disability and how that works when applying for jobs. I took the most information from that. Then, also my resume, I've never written a resume before so that was helpful. The guy told us, either you can write the resume or have somebody do it for you but you need to be able to convert your military experience into the civilian sector so it makes sense to civilian employers.

John was in a comparable situation in that he expressed finding benefits in learning how to write a resume for civilian employment for the first time. He particularly found value in the interview techniques they gave because he felt that "selling yourself on paper was far easier than doing it in person." He saw how some NAVY sailors struggled with transition, so he attended a year out from separating. When asked about his experience with a TAP class, he mentioned that he was asking the right questions to the right people about what he needed to do as soon as possible. The TAP class was at the top of everyone's to-do list so he decided to put it on his as well. He found out additional information after attending a TAP class and explained that while exploring different avenues helped, many of the options led him back to asking more questions about TAP:

> I found out about USA Jobs and the current employment I have now at TAP Class. I was just putting my resume out there, attending all of their sessions and someone mentioned Fleet and Family Services to me. Fleet and Family Services had an in-depth resume and interview course that went beyond the week-long TAP class and that was very helpful.

Anthony recalled TAP class giving him enough information to get him going in the right direction. He shared being out of the workforce for only 7 or 8 months, but he was able to put in many good resumes because he learned the basics at his TAP course. Tyrone and Mark said they both found value in it, although they both were very self-

motivated in preparing for transition. As Mark stated, “Information is information and I took as much as possible to ensure I had the least amount of challenges.”

TAP inadequacies and issues. Although all participants stated they thought TAP class had some value, most of them believed it needed to be revamped. While TAP class is a source of information, it is still extremely flawed, according to Jason. He went on to say it has much to offer but “I’ve seen guys go through the program and struggle far more than I did.” For example:

> Sometimes I feel like I learned more on my own than some people did from TAP class. I have a friend who did ten years in the Coast Guard and he got out and was still completely lost. I had to give him my resume and let him use it to change everything on his to what I had because we were in the same field. He was even lost on what he should wear to an interview, what to say, or what benefits he had access to, it was like he didn’t grasp any of the information in the course.

Jason believed that a week-long class is just not enough time to learn everything about benefits and how to transition to the civilian work sector. His suggestion was to offer the TAP class for veterans again when they get out, in case they need a refresher or, as in his situation, to let them take it when they did not have a chance to go at all. Jason was even on the fence about that because he thought the TAP class was a good idea despite being extremely flawed, with the potential to even hinder veterans as they transition. He explained how being overwhelmed with information can cause some veterans anxiety and feelings of hopelessness. He further explained what he thought were conflicting views:

> In some ways, after listening to other people go through it and seeing all of their struggles, I’m good. You know what, I’m kind of glad I didn’t waste my time. I wound up doing it on my own and I turned out better than they are even though they were provided the resource.

John also offered an example of a sailor who had anxiety about transitioning after taking a TAP class. His perception was that it was too overwhelming for anyone to receive anything out of the class:

> I took a TAP class with a senior chief in the NAVY and he had a good amount of years in the military. I recalled him asking questions to the instructors and he just looked lost. Mind you, this is a senior chief who has commanded hundreds of sailors underneath him. Prior to this, he was walking around like he was a big boss. Now to see this same senior chief quiver and have fear in his eyes when the instructors are telling him all the things he needs to do in order to get out and be successful is crazy. He was literally freaking out about this stuff and everything he needed to do.

In John's description of the TAP class, it involved too much instruction and advice at one time that can make veterans freeze up. John thought more needed to be done to ensure people were really understanding the information and able to apply it. Averre said, "All I remember is the VA stuff, everything else I probably slept through." His understanding of TAP was just a check in the box for the military to say they helped a veteran transition. Instead, he questioned their motives because none of their military or academic training was similar to this style of learning. He explained that when one is trying to learn one's military occupation specialty (MOS) or taking classes in college, the material is given with additional time to apply what is learned with some type of oversight. Averre then asked why transitioning should be any different.

Mark believed that a TAP class cannot be one-size-fits-all. He admitted it was tough being just a week long because most people will struggle with it if they do not have a real plan. He thought all the resources were there but they needed to be structured in a way that helped all veterans capture the information. He suggested:

> If a veteran knows when they're going to get out, obviously the sooner the better, have them take a portion of the class. Perhaps, it could be broken up into when they go to certain sections (i.e., VA benefits, Resume and Interviews,

> Department of Labor, etc.) so they can get a little bit of information at a time. Phasing in portions of the class when it's time for guys to re-enlist would work better than getting all the information at one time. Coming from this environment, being spoon fed about how to transition may be the best route.

Jeremy shared that TAP probably needs to be done months (or even years) in advance for it to work correctly. Tyrone echoed these comments in his interview by saying, "We don't explain this stuff or break it down that well, so veterans need more time to digest all of this information." He said some guys get out, go home, and forget all the lessons they were just fed on how to be successful in the civilian world. He thought a Plan A, B, and even C would be the right way to influence separating veterans to ensure that they understand the transition they are getting ready to experience. In fact, they really need to drill this information into their minds:

> That check you're used to getting, isn't coming anymore. Those medical and dental benefits are not going to be there anymore. That breakfast, lunch, and dinner that you were used to getting, you're not getting that no more unless you're coming out of your own pocket to pay for it. Above all, no one is telling you what you need to do anymore…you have to figure it all out on your own.

Elliott thought TAP class should have a more humanistic approach and focus on assisting the veteran as a "whole person" when they transition. In reflecting on the TAP class he attended, Elliott said he was really disappointed in the current practices. As he observed, "Veterans are coming straight out of high school or college and spending four to ten years in the service before separating and they really think a week-long class is going to explain how to live like civilians, you have to be fucking kidding me." He recalled telling a peer that "throwing a blanket [i.e., TAP class] on all of us and calling it a transition assistance program is not going to get it done." He further explained that getting a job when you get out is great, but if you are not handling things mentally, then you have a bigger problem." Elliott went into even more detail:

> Yes, it's important to make a living, but I think before I can work or do anything I had to be in a better place mentally. I just saw and experienced a lot of shit man and I think they didn't prepare us enough to function in society after the service. It's just more so pushing us to what can pay tomorrow's bill. But like, if you're not healthy mentally, physically, or emotionally, you're just not going to be able to do anything. I just feel like TAP needs a whole person focus. I understand not everyone is like me but it was just really hard for me. I felt like I wasn't getting anything out of it.

In dialogue, Elliott related his struggles with transitioning to topics the military could have addressed in a TAP class or with something similar to help veterans transition. He added, "A lot of the military programs put you in a corner and say you need to do this or that, and that's not encouraging people to change the world or make it a better place." His perception of a better TAP class was to help veterans find out what drives them (their passions in life) and makes them happy, while also providing the resources and/or help for them to reach that goal.

Reflection on Military Experience

All of the participants (100%) reported that reflecting on their military experience and what they learned while they were in proved to be a valuable resource for them in their transition. Lebron recalled missing the structure of the military to include the brotherhood/sisterhood one gets from serving and, especially, how it teaches people to work as a team to accomplish a goal for an organization. He described reflecting on his experience:

> When you're put in a tougher situation, harsher conditions, you tend to get tighter. When you come home and see people bitching and complaining about the stupidest things, it just puts your military experience in perspective for you. You get to a point where it's like, come on now, things aren't that bad because you realize you have been in worst situations.

Military discipline and structure. Lebron shared how he had a specific plan for when he came into the military as well as when he transitioned out, so he was always taking advantage of whatever resources put him closer to that goal. He noted that with the military, one is given a task to support a mission and having an end goal to accomplish something was, as Lebron explained, an adrenaline rush for many veterans. Veterans can miss having that adrenaline rush and the skill set of working under pressure in the civilian work sector, which can be beneficial in their overall success.

Lisa had a similar reflection by saying that in the military, it is the "'whole everybody' thing. We're all one working towards one goal." She noted that working in teams was beneficial for veterans to do and have as part of their skill set. Tyrone commented on his military experience by saying nothing in life is guaranteed so one must seize all opportunities to work both individually and as a team:

> I think the military has its ups and downs, just like any other job but I believe when the pros outweigh the cons, that's what is most important. I've learned from the military that it's a collection of a lot different things you experience in your time that prepare you for transition.

Anthony described reflecting on his military experience as an act that veterans always do when they experience challenges. He recalled that some of his shipmates went back home after separating from the military and struggled because they were in the same environment they knew when they left. However, now they had the skills to handle their situation. He said, "So of course they struggled at first with finding a job, but eventually they landed on their feet because they had the discipline and hard work that was instilled in them from the military."

Ability to adapt to change. All of the participants believed that the ability to adapt to change is a key part of transitioning successfully to the civilian sector. They

concluded that reflecting on one's military experience could be used as a tool for resiliency because it is an essential proficiency to have in the military. Cody shared that one important characteristic of soldiers is that they are highly adaptable:

> So, if we know going into a situation it's going to be different, we can mentally prepare ourselves. Like, okay I got that is going to be different but how? That's the first thing we're going to ask and what do I need to know about the differences from the civilian and military mindset to help me make this transition? So, when I walk through the door as a civilian, I already have in my head that this is not the military and I need to adapt. If I can get there mentally, then I'm okay.

Cody concluded that getting to that mental space is half the battle, and from there adaptability is doable. To this aspect, Averre explained, "There is a lot of deprogramming going on and veterans just learn how to adapt when they do." He went on to say that veterans wear an air of confidence and they need to have the ability to turn it on and off when transitioning to the civilian world. In his experience, Averre said veterans need to be the best of both worlds:

> We can take all of the good things from the military and not so much the bad things because that'll make it more difficult for them to be successful in the civilian world. Take those things out and you'll have the best of both worlds when you transition.

Rheuben said the military matures an individual. He found for himself that the more responsibility the military gave him, the more he matured into the man he is today. Responsibilities can "suck" when one comes out of high school, but one quickly learns how much responsibilities are needed both in the military and ultimately in transition. Rheuben noted that without responsibility, "you have anarchy." Jeremy found maturity through his military experience and credited that as one of many things that helped him secure a job in Human Resources as a federal civilian employee.

Mark said people hear that military members have discipline all the time. The military puts a person in challenging situations at an early age, but this helps for the rest of one's life. Discipline is as simple as accomplishing tasks in a specified time at a high quality, as he said:

> My demeanor, me being a people person, and overall how I move is the main part of me being successful in the finance field. The military is a big part of that, it's in everything I do from my schedule, follow-ups, and how I stay organized.

Cheryl summed up how reflecting on her military experience helped her to transition: "Overall, the military is a great learning tool and I really had a great time. I really enjoyed the discipline, the growth, and a lot of the things that were instilled in me, and the relationships that I've built within my time in the U.S. military are still in me."

In summary, the military transition resources that participants found the most helpful were their ability to reflect on their military experience and the TAP class. Although the TAP class was beneficial, participants noted it was inadequate in meeting their needs for civilian preparation.

Finding 3: Challenges to Military Transition

Participants were asked to describe what challenges they faced when transitioning to the civilian sector and how they were able to overcome those challenges. The majority of veterans expressed that issues within their civilian work environments (93%) were the most prevalent challenge when transitioning. Fear of change about military transitions

was also noted as a challenge for veterans because they were uncertain about the future. Below, Figure 7 outlines the challenges of military transition.

Finding #3: Challenges to Military Transition

The vast majority of participants (93%) reported having challenges with their civilian employers when they transitioned out of the military. Veterans indicated that their challenges arose from a fear of change that included assimilation difficulties to civilian life.

Veterans described the most challenging aspect of transition as:

Civilian Employer Issues (14 of 15, 93%)
- Difference in work ethic
- Lack of structure in the civilian work sector

Fear of Change (12 of 15, 80%)
- Not knowing what to expect
- Issues with assimilating

Figure 7. Finding #3 outline

Civilian Employer Issues

Veterans described how transitioning to the civilian work sector was a challenge coming from the structured environment of the military. As Rheuben shared, "Some civilian workplaces are completely different from the military because in the military you're always on the go. The work ethic is like night and day." He went on to share:

> Even if you were somebody who wasn't that much of a worker, you still had to be on the go all the time. So, in the civilian world, if they gave me an assignment I was working on that assignment and never wanted to sit down. I wanted to get the job done so I can start working on the next one. A lot of my co-workers had to pretty much talk me down from that. I didn't like that, but at the same time I kind of understood it. But, everyone's work ethic is different.

Difference in work ethic. Jason agreed with these thoughts by saying, "For the most part, in the military everyone was the same caliber of worker as you." He explained:

> I find it difficult sometimes in the civilian workforce that everyone is not on the same page and you know it can be frustrating at times when some people don't work as hard or as efficient as you. There's a lot of variances in education and aptitude all doing the same job.

John said, "I'm not trying to get brownie points or anything like that, but because of the way I am, I'm pretty much looked at by my co-workers as the guy who will get the job done." He explained how the people he has worked with in the civilian world do not have the same work mentality and that was very "irritating" to him. He also mentioned how he got into verbal disputes with several co-workers because of their differences in work performances.

> I'm trying to get the job done but they basically wanted to lollygag and just act like I'm trying to be better than them or I'm trying to show out or something like that. That wasn't the case at all. They would make some sly remarks underneath their breath and I had to put them in check quickly by saying don't approach me like that. I'm here to do my job, I ain't here to be your friend. I wasn't tolerating it.

Cody explained how the military mindset was different when they approached their jobs. He said, "we're all driving for something bigger than this," so of course tension will be evident when working in the civilian sector because they do not share that philosophy. Cody elaborated by noting:

> We all have that common thread that we raised our right hand and we said, "we will defend this nation against all enemies foreign and domestic." Everybody who wore a uniform wrote a blank check. It's a mindset that everybody shares that just puts you in a different category.

Abdul attributed his challenges to finding a job after deployment as a direct result of the civilian work sector's contrasting mindset:

> They know we're great workers but sometimes there is a stigma. Oh, he's a veteran so he might have mental issues. A lot of civilians support the troops but then again, when it comes to their own company, it's kind of not so much.

Jeremy's summation of the difference between military and civilian work is the large amount of downtime in the civilian sector. As he said, "There is a lot of lax working with civilians." Work that Rheuben said he thought was basic was not being done in the civilian work world as much: "My buddies at work would give me a hard time and say 'Why are you always here?'" If his shift started at 2:30 p.m., he would be at work between 2:10-2:15 p.m. He said, "It's a habit that won't break, but it's a good one." Rheuben proclaimed that by being in the military, one develops this switch which needs to happen and which puts one in a mode of "I don't care how we get this job done but we're going to get it done and done the right way." Usually, when Rheuban is at his civilian workplace, people leave him alone because he is in the zone, but he explained there are always people he works with who frustrate him:

> I've learned some people I work well with and other people it's like, why do you got me working with this dude? That means I have to do all of the work. I do all his work plus my work. You kind of gauge who you click with better and who you can vibe with better than you do anybody else because you have the same work ethic. If I have to work with the dude that clocks in fifteen minutes late and clocks out ten minutes early, I'm pissed.

Lisa shared how she sees this "me first mentality" in the civilian work sector. She mentioned that she embraced the change of pace in the civilian work sector, but disliked the lack of pride in the quality of work that some of her civilian co-workers produced. Cheryl echoed this in her interview by saying an "organizational disorganization" is going on in the civilian work sector, which is extremely lacking in "candor and espirit de corps." In her experience, she said that there is no structure or respect for leaders when working in the civilian corporate world. She believed the reason is because:

> people are being put in leadership positions but are not leaders. They don't have the textbook skills of developing people, bringing people together, or just staff

> buy in. There's always going to be a breakdown in structure when people are hired just because someone likes you.

Lack of structure in the civilian work sector. Lebron said the lack of structure in the civilian work section was the toughest thing to get used to in the civilian world. The military provided structure and discipline so that everybody understood his or her purpose. Lebron initially found law enforcement challenging because he noticed that his counterparts did not respect the rank structure as he did. "There's a line you don't cross," he said. Casey also worked in law enforcement after separating from the military and agreed with Lebron that he found challenges with structure in the civilian work world. He shared that in his experiences of working in both sectors, the Coast Guard's work ethic was much better. One has pride in one's work, there is accountability for one's actions, and people understand the structure of the organization. He elaborated on the differences in structure:

> The biggest problem that I've noticed is the rank structure and comradery. In the military, if your pay grade is E5 and an E6 told you to do something than you do it because he was higher ranking. It's the complete opposite on the civilian side. Of course, within legal reason. In the civilian law enforcement world, you would think that the comradery and the brotherhood that they portray is real tight but it's totally opposite. It's like every man for themselves. It's like only in the time of crisis is there a brotherhood, any other time there's minimal structure and togetherness.

Anthony said, "Without a doubt, it's chain of command/structure that is the biggest challenge." He did not believe people followed it as much in the civilian work sector because "they are kind of all over the place," he said. Jason noticed that for him to move past this challenge, he had to learn how to work with people again:

> Everything is a challenge, right? It's just all a matter of how difficult that challenge is going to be. So, yeah at first it was challenging and I had to re-learn how to work with people, how to lead people, how to follow someone, like be a

> true follower you know? All of that took time, it was just a matter of excepting the challenge without losing who I was as a person.

On the other hand, Elliott expressed not having any issues with his civilian employers. As he explained, "People enjoy the fact that you're a veteran, they admire it. And only one percent of our society does it, so I feel like that's a huge advantage." He went on to say:

> My view may be different than others. I like real estate for the independence. I guess you go to the opposite of what you're used to. After the military, I enjoyed having the flexibility to kind of plan my day however I see fit.

Fear of Change

Eighty percent of the participants described one of their challenges to transitioning to the civilian work sector was not knowing what would happen to them after they separated. They described having the capability to be adaptable to a new environment but still with a sense of fear towards the unknown.

Not knowing what to expect. Jason said separating was "a hard pill to swallow because I didn't really know what to expect." The civilian workforce was difficult at first, he said. Lebron spoke of a similar feeling of not knowing what was next: "The military kind of sets you up to have everything you need so when you separate and lose everything, you have to figure that out before you can move on." Casey concurred:

> It was very nerve wrecking because I got out of the Coast Guard on a hardship. I knew that once I was totally out, there was no coming back. It was very scary, there were no guarantees going forward. I had to make a choice and live with that.

John's fears derived from how he would support his family:

> That was the scariest part for me, the not knowing where I would work. Trying to figure out what was going to happen and what job I would be able to get. Even though, I had certain skill sets in the military, a lot of those skill sets really didn't apply to certain jobs out there.

Mark had a comparable challenge when he was separating because he was a hospital corpsman in the military who felt that his skills did not or would not translate to the civilian work sector. As he pointed out:

> You can translate some of your military skills to the civilian work sector. It's tough being able to actually take those skill sets and put them down on paper, in addition to the civilian workforce lacking vision. They always want somebody with experience, but don't understand the skill sets that allow people to function effectively in a job. If I wanted to get a job in the medical field, I wouldn't be qualified even though I've been in numerous life or death situations but a civilian that just graduated school with no real-life medical emergency experience could get that same job.

Jeremy had career transition challenges as well because he expressed not being comparable, in terms of salary, to his civilian counterparts. "You have to have a degree for everything, skills seem optional," he said. He continued by saying, "In the civilian sector, you have to start at the bottom everywhere and the only experience I had at the time was driving trucks, so I didn't know what my value would be in the civilian world."

Cody believed that to transition successfully, one has to accept your new place in society. He elaborated by saying:

> I need to accept that the environment is going to be different. The interpersonal dynamics are going to be different. The management styles are going to be a lot different. Those kinds of things I need to accept before I get there or else I will reject where I'm going because it's so alien to me.

Issues with assimilating. He thought the caveat to issues with assimilating was that not everyone will accept change and that was where fear and other problems can arise. Cheryl reported that identity challenges can be a part of the fear of changing. She said, "Maybe it was pride issues or knowing that you went through all of this military training and now you're back at square one. I just felt like, I should be more than this." Rheuben echoed the identity fear because he expressed feeling like once he came home,

he had to "convince himself that he wasn't a failure and how to make sense of being a civilian."

Averre explained that he could definitely understand why veterans struggle because it is hard for some to lose that military mindset. He said, "It's disorienting and some people just don't adapt well." Elliot said he experienced a disorienting mindset after he transitioned:

> I had to get really low**.** I was just down. And you start abusing alcohol, hanging out. The gift and the curse to being me is that I have a lot of people that care about me. Even that can be a crutch.

John said, "You're so used to being spoonfed by the military for so many years and then all of sudden that spoon is taken out of your mouth, that is a scary feeling." It can easily become too much for some guys:

> I remember guys who came out the military who I know personally who didn't get a job for almost a year and half. That made me sad because they were stressed out, drinking, they didn't know what they were going to do. There were a couple people who even considered suicide because they were so fearful of not knowing.

In summary, the majority of participants reported having challenges with their civilian employers when they separated from the military. Additionally, they noted that these challenges caused a fear of change when transitioning to the civilian work sector and resulted in additional hardships with acclimating to their new life.

Finding 4: Personal and Professional Influences

All participants reported having a battle buddy and/or family member assist them with transitioning to the civilian work sector. A battle buddy is a service member who directly served with the veteran in the same branch, unit, and division. A veteran is

another service member who has served in the armed forces but not directly with the participant.

Sixty-six percent of the participants described a battle buddy as a valuable influence during their transition who provided tangible or intangible advice. Seventy-three percent of the participants described a family member as being influential during their transition. The level of assistance varied, from helping them find a job, write a resume, and filling out military paperwork, to providing moral guidance throughout the process. In both instances, the battle buddy and family member served as a positive influence in their transition. Below, Figure 8 outlines the thematic personal and professional influences for the participants during transition.

Finding #4: Personal and Professional Influences

Participants described a battle buddy (65%) or another veteran as a positive influence in helping them transition to the civilian world. Moreover, family either overlapped or filled an influential gap as a positive influence when they separated.

Veterans described their personal & professional influences as:

Battle Buddies/Veterans (11 of 15, 73%)

- Learning from others experience
- Job assistance
-

Family Assistance as a Resource (11 of 15, 73%)

- Support Systems
- Moral Support

Figure 8. Finding #4 outline

Battle Buddies/Veterans

Veterans described who and what kinds of support they received when they transitioned from active duty to the civilian workforce. The majority (73%) reported that a battle buddy assisted them along the way.

Learning from others' experience. Mark shared that he saw what other sailors went through when they transitioned out and he did not want to do that. He credited that as the reason why he was so self-directed in preparing his transition:

> I was around a lot of older guys when I was in, so they were a year or two ahead of me. So when I see them get out and they're not doing anything and they're like, "I'm trying to still figure this all out" while they're working at a fast food joint; it was a lesson learned for me. This is definitely not what I'm interested in.

After what Mark saw in his old battle buddies, not only did he learn from their experience but he also served as the battle buddy that helped out his fellow sailors by "being the voice of encouragement." He would tell them how to get a good resume together and keep "putting their stuff out there."

Anthony expressed that learning about his benefits was extremely helpful and he got that advice from a battle buddy. He said:

> The TAP class being only a week, you just don't remember everything but I got lucky because I ran into my friend at the VA office and he was the one who was telling me about a lot of benefits I didn't know I had access to.

Averre recalled he had a close battle buddy that was always on him: "He helped me whenever he could with all the military side of stuff, making sure I had the right paperwork before I got out and everything else taken care of." He did not know much about the civilian side of stuff, but he explained how he was already all over that on his own.

Jeremy's philosophy was to reach out to battle buddies and veterans. He believed everything he did not know counted:

> I reached out to the local VA office and got connected to a couple disabled veterans. So, I would go to them for information. They didn't know a whole lot but I did get some information from them.

Job assistance. John's attributes his first job post-military to one of his battle buddies. "The only reason why I got the job was because the person who hired me had worked with me at a previous duty station and he knew my work ethic." He explained how he learned a lot from him and other battle buddies about how to navigate civilian employment. He believed that "as long as you have people behind you that will actually teach you the tricks of the trade on what you're supposed to do, you can transition better." He explained further about this one battle buddy:

> I used to have this roommate when were on a ship together. There were certain responsibilities that I had to take upon myself. I would pretty much be like, whatever, I'll get to it I'm not worried about that. He would be the one to give me that tough love, like stop bullshitting and go forward and do what you need to do because the military is not going to be there forever. No one is going to tell you these things when you get out, so you need to go ahead and do it.

Casey shared that he would go to his battle buddies for advice about different civilian jobs. He appreciated their supportiveness and respected their opinions.

Lisa also explained how she found her teaching job by way of a friend/battle buddy. She mentioned there was a scholarship program where she could teach and complete her Master's degree, so she jumped on the opportunity and has had a career in education ever since. Lebron had a similar situation because he had plans to work in law enforcement in his hometown, but a battle buddy offered him a job as a police officer in another state:

> I deployed with a few guys who I never knew were police officers. They had similar temperaments as mine so I thought that was cool that they worked in law enforcement. The Lieutenant in my unit worked for a county police force and he got me the job and I've been working in the field ever since I separated.

Family Assistance as a Resource

A large number of participants (73%) reported that their family was influential for them when they were transitioning to the civilian work sector.

Family support. Jason's first job after he separated was working for his sister's company. He said, "I don't normally put that on resumes because it was off the books, but it really helped me stay on my feet until I found a good full-time job." Tyrone felt that his transition was much easier because early on in life, his parents either taught him some of what veterans struggle with as they move forward or they served as a resource when he transitioned. Jason said, "I wasn't some eighteen- or nineteen-year-old kid coming in. I had a degree when I enlisted so that's a huge difference, but my parents taught me everything."

Jeremy recalled his two uncles getting out the military at the same time he did. He shared that they were retiring and he was separating, but they still gave him a ton of information on certain military policies before he got out. As he said, "My uncles were always giving me the heads-up on medical records to get copies of and overall advice on what I needed to do."

Cheryl's uncle was also in prior service and provided some guidance for her when she separated:

> My uncle was telling me about this VA program so I went down to the place in my city and they gave me some essentials. I got a grocery store voucher so I could get food, maybe two hundred dollars and at that time that was really helpful

> because I needed it. They had different programs to pay utility bills as well, so I took the assistance that I could until I got on my feet.

Moral support. Rheuben explained that his Mom and Dad were his biggest support system. Prior to separating, he sent his Mom copies of everything to ensure he did not miss anything, and in case of any lost documents, he could easily resend them. He said, "After a while, she started to call herself my secretary." His Dad is still in the military, so Rheuban felt like he could go to him when he thought his command was not providing the correct information:

> My dad was like the biggest support system when it came time for me to get chaptered out and everything like that. So much of that stuff didn't make sense to me but my Dad had separated and went back in to the military so he knew exactly what I was going through. I would always ask him, "does this look right?" when I had to sign paperwork. I also have a cousin who is stationed in another state so he was another resource for me as well.

Abdul said his family was always very supportive of him, especially when he went through seven different jobs before finding stable employment. He expressed how he found that a tough mental and humbling space because he had grown accustomed to supporting himself. One of the jobs he mentioned was at a furniture store in which a family member's connection helped him get employed. Abdul said, "I needed a job and I got one through my sister because her friend needed someone to help deliver furniture so I made it work." Similarly, Anthony said he was just doing a lot of networking within his family:

> I was going on a couple of interviews and not having to wait on a long waiting list in addition to my cousin having a connection who worked at Delta Airlines. I was just trying to find what peaked my interest.

Lebron mentioned his family support, but not so much in an assisting with employment capacity, but rather in filling the gap of the brotherhood camaraderie that he experienced while he was deployed. However, he explained that it was tough:

> I was gone for eighteen months, so initially it sucks but then you get used to it. Now you come back home and you don't see the people you used to chill with all the time. We would call each almost every day because you were just with each other so much but it just got tough. Over time, my family started to fill that role.

In summary, participants described having a battle buddy or another veteran as advantageous during their transition process. Moreover, family members were also essential to their transition and often served as a positive support system.

Focus Group Discussion

The focus group participants corroborated the findings of the individual interviews by describing their conceptualization of the transition experience as their military leadership not caring about their transition and the overall need to be self-directed as they transitioned to a civilian career. Participants collectively agreed on having a general mistrust of the current systems in place that are supposed to be used as resources because they thought they were only a facade. Participants concurred that military resources such as TAP class were mostly inefficient because they themselves either did not attend the mandatory training or did not find value in it to prepare for the civilian workforce.

Participants validated that civilian employer issues were the most prevalent challenge to their military transition because they believed that the military has harder-working employees than the civilian workforce. Lastly, participants expressed that battle buddies and family members had influence over their transition to civilian employment. Moreover, they were positive support systems that assisted them with finding employment after separating from active duty.

Summary of Findings

This chapter highlighted the four major findings discovered in this research. The data from the individual interviews and supportive data from the focus group were organized based on the research questions. The research findings revealed how veterans conceptualized their transition experience, the most helpful military transition resources, challenges to military transition, and positive personal/professional influences. The researcher included extensive candid statements and direct quotes from the participants to illustrate their lived experiences accurately.

As the first finding, the majority of the veterans indicated that because their leadership did not provide adequate support when they were transitioning, they had to be self-directed. Veterans indicated that lack of support from their military leaders impeded their progress in transitioning successfully. Some participants expressed that the perceived lack of support derived from personal problems and biases with their leadership. They elaborated on feelings of no one caring about their transition, which in turn led to not having any clear guidance and much uncertainty about the future.

For most, the lack of support from leadership created a need for the participants to be self-directed in their transition. They discussed how they were accustomed to the military structure, and learning about all the intricacies of the civilian sector was an overwhelming experience for them. They often described it as a culture shock but understood they had to be proactive in learning their new life/career. They reported talking to many different people, researching online, and learning as much new information as possible.

As the second finding, veterans indicated how the military TAP class was the most helpful resource when they transitioned, but it needed major changes. All of the participants who attended a TAP class reported finding some value from it and learned new information about transitioning. Additionally, they also expressed how challenging it was to retain all of the information needed in a week-long class and how its structure was not conducive to learning how to be successful as a civilian. Veterans who did not attend TAP class expressed frustration about not attending and how they may have missed out on information that could have helped them along the way. Another resource participants found helpful was reflection on their military experience which they used to help them transition. Participants spoke about military discipline and how this intangible resource helped them gain the skill sets of resiliency and maturity when they transitioned. Furthermore, other skill sets like working in teams were mentioned and how useful they were to help participants adapt to the change of transitioning to civilian culture.

As the third finding, the majority of veterans had challenges with their civilian employers when they transitioned out of the military. Differences in work ethic were expressed and participants described the civilian workplace as lacking leadership and discipline. A large number of participants shared that civilian mindsets in the workplace did not value hard work and pride in their work production. Prior to separating, another challenge participants revealed was not knowing what to expect when they transitioned. For some, this caused a fear of change about what to expect in the future and issues with assimilating to the civilian sector.

As the fourth finding, veterans described how a battle buddy, other veterans, and family members served as positive influences in helping them transition to the civilian

world. Participants described how they were able to obtain useful information from their battle buddies or learn from their negative experiences. They spoke about how they were able to help them obtain employment or provide guidance on what needed to be done to be successful in the civilian sector. Additionally, a significant number of participants discussed that in addition to battle buddies, their family was also supportive with their transition by providing job assistance or moral support.

To understand the full breadth of the findings, the researcher arranged each research question with its major findings statement and the goal of answering the overarching question of: How do separated enlisted service members experience career transition after leaving active duty and going into the civilian workforce? The results of the overarching question produced three thematic topics to frame the findings for analysis and interpretation. Thematic topic 1 is becoming self-directed when they recognize assistance from military leadership is minimal. Thematic topic 2 is adapting to change using military experience, TAP classes, and networking with battle buddies or other veterans. Thematic topic 3 is acknowledging that preparation and acclimation to the civilian work sector are needed. Table 5 illustrates the connection between the research questions and the findings, for which the researcher used the thematic topics to situate the analysis and interpretation.

Table 5

Thematic Topics

Research Questions	Findings
How do veterans describe their transition from active duty to the civilian workforce?	Finding #1: Majority of veterans indicated that because their leadership did not provide adequate support when they transitioned, they had to be self-directed in their learning.
What type of resources were utilized by veterans to assist with their transition to the civilian workforce?	Finding #2: Veterans indicated that the military TAP class was the most helpful resource when they transitioned, but it needed major changes so they used their experiences obtained from the military to transition.
What personal and professional influences do veterans describe as an advantage during the reintegration process?	Finding #4: Veterans described a battle buddy or family member as a positive influence in helping them transition to the civilian world.
What challenges do veterans experience during their transition from active duty to the civilian workforce?	Finding #3: Majority of veterans reported having challenges with their civilian employers when they transitioned out the military.

Research Question: Separated enlisted service members experience career transition by:

1. Becoming self-directed when recognizing assistance from military leadership is minimal.

2. Adapting to change using military experience, TAP class, and networking with battle buddies or family members.

3. Acknowledging that preparation and acclimation to the civilian work sector is needed.

(Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012)

Chapter V

ANALYSIS, SYNTHESIS, AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the learning experiences of enlisted veterans after they transitioned from the military to the civilian workforce. The researcher interviewed 15 veterans with the purpose of obtaining insight into how they described the military transition process, through their own experience, when reintegrating into the civilian world. This study explored the following research questions:

1. How do veterans describe their transition from active duty to the civilian workforce?
2. What challenges do veterans experience during their transition from active duty to the civilian workforce?
3. What type of resources were utilized by veterans to assist with their transition to the civilian workforce?
4. What personal and professional influences do veterans describe as an advantage during the reintegration process?

The findings from the research questions were focused on and satisfied in Chapter IV. Four major findings were presented as follows:

1. The majority of veterans described that they needed to be self-directed when they transitioned because they had limited support from their military leadership.
2. Most veterans indicated that the military TAP class was the most helpful resource when they transitioned so they used their experiences obtained from the military to aid with transition.
3. The vast majority of veterans reported having challenges with their civilian employers when they transitioned out of the military.
4. All participants described a battle buddy or family member as a positive influence in helping them transition to the civilian world.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section is the analysis rationale, which explains the researcher's reasoning for using a counseling development perspective to situate the findings into two analytic categories: unanticipated and anticipated transitions. The second section presents the essence of the veterans' views within the three thematic topics using the two analytic categories as a framework. The third section is the researcher's understanding and interpretation of the participants' perspectives on their overall experience transitioning from active duty to the civilian work sector. Synthesis is highlighted throughout the analysis and interpretation to note support from the transition theory literature. Additionally, the interpretation allowed the researcher to return to the assumptions formulated during the process of this research and close with some personal reflections involving her interactions with veterans in this study.

Analysis Rationale

In the previous chapter, the research questions lined up with the findings; in this chapter, the findings will be integrated to form a connected view of understanding the overarching question: How do separated enlisted service members experience career transition after leaving active duty and going into the civilian workforce? After integrating the findings, three thematic topics were derived from the participant interviews: (a) becoming self-directed when recognizing assistance from military leadership is minimal; (b) adapting to change using military experience, TAP classes, and networking with battle buddies or family members; and (c) acknowledging that preparation and acclimation to the civilian work sector are needed.

The use of thematic topics not only illustrates the themes of the findings, but it also renders a way to analyze and interpret the different viewpoints of the participants in this research. Based on the participants' different viewpoints of their experience with transition, the researcher categorized the veterans into two transition development perspectives: anticipated and unanticipated transitions. From the veteran sample of 15, nine were categorized as unanticipated and six as anticipated transitions. As discussed in Chapter II, adults experience transitions differently, according to what stage of life they are in and how they process change. Schlossberg's (1991) theory was highlighted and how it involved two groups of people in unanticipated and anticipated transitions. She classified anticipated transitions as scheduled, expected events that occur in one's life. To the contrary, unanticipated transitions were classified as non-scheduled events that are considered unpredictable (Schlossberg, 1991).

As delineated in the findings, some veterans were more prepared to transition to the civilian world than others and can be classified as having an anticipated transition. The beneficial nature of this transition was a result of some veterans having the opportunity to plan and role-rehearse their post-military life, both mentally and physically (Anderson et al., 2012). Unanticipated transitions that the participants experienced usually involved a crisis, abrupt incident, and other unexpected occurrences that did not allow them to prepare properly. Additionally, veterans who were classified as having an unanticipated transition described having a sudden separation from the military. The following explanation and table serve as evidence of the participants' unanticipated and anticipated transitional classifications in this research.

Unanticipated transitioned veterans had the most displeasure when transitioning to the civilian work sector. They reported not having a positive experience when they transitioned or wished they would have done things differently. They reported receiving the least amount of assistance from their military leadership and noted that they had to do the majority of learning about the civilian work sector on their own. Three of the five participants did not attend a TAP class and the others reported getting almost nothing out of the class, feeling like it was a waste of time. For them, networking with battle buddies and family members was more helpful in acclimating to the civilian world.

Table 6 represents the participants' testimony on why they were categorized as experiencing an unanticipated transition:

Table 6

Unanticipated Transitioned Veterans

Participant Perspectives	Veteran Comments
John	He explained that when he got out, it really wasn't by choice. He had retirement tenure and the Navy was downsizing so he got forced out with a little under a year before separation. He believed service members needed a minimum of 2 years to properly prepare for transition to the civilian sector.
Jason	He felt his experience transitioning out was terrible because he was discharged within 30 days of not accepting a duty station after voluntarily signing up to deploy to a war zone. Additionally, he was never counseled or advised to take a TAP class.
Casey	He explained that he got out of the military on a hardship because of family reasons and once it got approved through headquarters he was separated in two days. He noted that he got no transition assistance and got lucky finding a job immediately after separating.
Cheryl	She explained that when she came back from a deployment, she was immediately separated out with no assistance. It was described as a bad experience on how her transition to the civilian sector unfolded.
Anthony	He explained that after having his daughter, the multiple deployments became too much and he needed to separate immediately because the military would not give him a duty station closer to his home. He wished he had done things differently as he tried to go back into the military a couple years later.
Rheuben	He discussed that he got tired of the military politics and decided to separate when he was close to the end of his military contract that did not give him a lot of time to prepare for transition. He noted it was a really tough experience for him.
Elliott	He noted that he got out close to the end of his contract and did not think about what he wanted to do with his life until months later when the military paychecks stopped coming in. He explained that he struggled a lot.
Jeremy	He expressed that he had separated last minute with minimal time to prepare because he was working long shifts to fill gaps for other Air men that were deployed. He noted it was challenging trying to do everything on his own.
Averre	He explained that he separated on special circumstances and did not have much time to prepare so the military provided a checklist for him. He noted having six or more jobs after separating.

Anticipated transitioned veterans had the least amount of displeasure when transitioning to the civilian sector, although they also reported receiving limited assistance from their military leadership. They reported having to be extremely self-directed in their transition but prepared for transition through multiple different avenues to ensure a smoother transition. All but one of the participants attended a TAP class and found some value from it, but still thought it needed to be updated to serve the common transitioning veteran. Networking with battle buddies and family members during their transition was an essential resource for obtaining new information that they felt helped them obtain a job and/or overall assistance with acclimating to the civilian sector.

Table 7 represents the participants' testimony on why they were categorized as experiencing an anticipated transition.

Analysis

The analysis section discusses the collaborated perspectives of the above analytic categories of two groups: unanticipated and anticipated transitioned veterans. Through the context of the three thematic topics that emerged from the findings and the transition and adult learning theory literature, the researcher sought to find a deeper meaning of the experiences of the participants.

Thematic Topic 1

Becoming self-directed when recognizing assistance from military leadership is minimal.

Unanticipated transition. With the understanding that the unanticipated group had the most challenges with transitioning, being acceptive to limited military leadership

Table 7

Anticipated Transitioned Veterans

Participant Perspectives	Veteran Comments
Mark	He stated he took TAP class two weeks prior to separating but had been planning for over a year. Additionally, he expressed that he had a clear vision of what he was going to do when he separated and that he had already moved to Las Vegas to start school a month before getting out.
Tyrone	He explained that he had a degree when he first went into the military and had a plan from the start that he was not going to make this a full-time occupation after completing his Master's degree using the education benefits that he earned.
Lebron	He explained that going into the military he had a plan to do his in 6 years and use the education benefits to finish his Bachelor's degree; then he would go into another career in the civilian sector.
Lisa	She stated that transitioning was easy for her because she already had her mind made up she was getting out before it was time for her to fill out paperwork to reenlist or separate.
Abdul	He noted that he knew exactly when he was getting out which was right after deployment. Although he believed he was not ready to transition, it was much of his own fault for not taking advantage of the benefits offered to him.
Cody	He stated that transitioning back to the civilian sector was easier for him because the TAP class helped him return to a civilian employer seamlessly.

assistance and overall willingness to be self-directed was an arduous process expressed by these veterans. The participants in this group struggled to develop into self-directed learners and, until they sought help from someone, they experienced extensive unemployment or hardships. Grow (1991) believed that some adult learners are enduringly dependent because they lack either knowledge, skills, and abilities or the ambition and self-confidence to pursue their goals. All of the veterans in the unanticipated group shared that knowledge about the civilian work sector, and their abilities to be successful were in question at one point in their transition.

All of the participants pointed to culture shock as a result of the differences between the military and the civilian sector. In addition, it was often expressed that the change of work pace in the civilian sector was challenging because they were not provided guidance prior to separating. Their perceived shortcomings of military leadership during transition resulted in resentment and animosity in the process of how veterans are treated when they leave the military. It was noted that the understanding of their specific reasons for separating during transition was difficult for some of them to understand (i.e., forced out or quick separation), let alone how to deal with the changing demands of working outside of the military. Ultimately, this caused feelings of pressure and hesitation to become career adaptable in the civilian work sector as they attempted to find balance in their changing world conditions (Super & Knasel, 1981).

Anticipated transition. By contrast, the anticipated transition group was more receptive to becoming self-directed and impartial about the military leadership's minimal involvement. Although some expressed having some setbacks along the way, they always had confidence that things would work out because they prepared for transition. They

expressed being able and willing to take responsibility for their transition as a result of learning and being open to the new skill sets they needed in the civilian sector. Furthermore, it was using their military-transferable skills that allowed them to transition ideally to the civilian sector.

Unlike the unanticipated group, anticipated transitioned veterans reported that they accepted assistance from others primarily as facilitators in their transition. Candy (1991) delineated that adult learners experience a manifestation of personality attributes that suggest continuous learning is a process of self-management and autonomy. Essentially, they believed that they were directly accountable for how their transition would unfold and taking full personal responsibility was expected. This group recognized the need to be self-directed and expressed reflecting on their military experience as they transitioned as a means of readiness. This was acknowledged as a form of resilience that they could draw from and gave them the motivation to accomplish anything. Moreover, they expressed seeing the benefits and challenges of transitioning to the civilian sector as a new beginning with a fresh set of goals to accomplish (Bridges, 2004).

Thematic Topic 2

Adapting to change using military experience, a TAP class, and networking with battle buddies and family members.

Unanticipated transition. Unanticipated transitioned veterans struggled with adapting to change after coming from the disciplined, structured environment of the military. “When people experience a work transition, especially when it is unanticipated, they may feel as though they’re in a crisis” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 167). The ambiguity of the civilian work sector and this group’s hesitance to let go of former roles

and learn new ones were challenging because they relied heavily on military resources, including TAP classes, to teach them everything they needed to know. Participants expressed that everything was given to them in the military or explicitly expressed, and the civilian sector deviation from that was perplexing, making transformation from one position to the next laborious. Bridges (1980) wrote that people need to feel defensive about having an apparent unproductive break at critical junctures in their lives because psychologically, they need to be in a moratorium of space from their previous existence.

This group of veterans reported finding value from networking with battle buddies and family members. Although they had more challenges, they were able to rely on them as a credible support system during their transition. Even with the use of drawing from military experience, some unanticipated transitioned veterans felt that it was counterproductive for them. They believed that the skills they obtained from the military were not relevant in the civilian sector. During the interviews, they expressed the challenges of getting to a mental space that would allow them to be receptive to transition in an effective way. Fouad and Bynner (2008) noted that people experiencing unanticipated transitions have completed minimal preparation and consequently have to make decisions in less-than-ideal logical contexts.

Anticipated transition. On the other hand, in recognizing the need to become self-directed, anticipated transitioned veterans adapted to change by drawing from their military experience, finding value in the military TAP class, and networking with battle buddies and family members to aid in their transition. They concluded that although the TAP class was inadequate for most, they took advantage of all the resources offered and built from that knowledge base. Anticipated transitioned veterans learned both tangible and intangible

skills from within the military sector and sought to fill the gaps in knowledge from outside when needed. Participants in this group recognized the need to learn from others in various ways such as dialogue, heeding advice, and not making the same mistakes as veterans who came before them. In essence, the established plan they had for transition was subject to the unpredictability of life, so if there were any surprises, either positive or negative, they would commence an alternative plan (Anderson et al., 2012).

Coming from a structured environment such as the military did not affect the anticipated transitioned veterans as much because they understood that the civilian sector was not the same. They expressed experiencing similar disorienting dilemmas during the transition process as unanticipated transitioned veterans; however, they focused on having a rational mindset and making transformative meaning out of experiences that were deemed unfavorable (Mezirow, 1995). This adeptness to change made them more responsive to networking with battle buddies or family members who served as a support system and demonstrated varying expertise. This group of participants concluded that every veteran has different abilities to be self-directed and any deficiencies can be taught (Grow, 1991).

Thematic Topic 3

Acknowledging that preparation and acclimation to the civilian work sector is needed.

Unanticipated transition. According to their theory, Fiske and Chiriboga (1990) noted that "a value system that contributes to assimilation at one life stage may be dysfunctional at another for different individuals" (p. 81). In this instance, the unanticipated group discussed having the same struggles as the anticipated group in the civilian sector

and also found personal and professional reward from working hard, but they still reported having more challenges with transition than the anticipated transition group. They noted that having anxiety with how they would support themselves and/or family was a reason for them to fear change. Additionally, they expressed feeling overwhelmed with their transition and had negative encounters within the civilian work community.

Unanticipated transitioned veterans communicated their perception of civilian employers as not having the proper leadership skills to lead their employees. They felt there was no clear chain of command and people were generally disrespectful towards other people and the job itself. They noted it was huge challenge for them to work in that environment because they were used to everyone knowing their purpose in the organization and working towards a common goal. Being resilient in this situation, as the anticipated transitioned veterans were, was not an easy task for them. Maddi (2002) stressed that adults have varying individual differences and stressful changes may be debilitating for some people, but to others they are developmentally exhilarating.

Anticipated transition. The anticipated transitioned veterans acknowledged the need for readjustment and immediately learned that preparation and acclimation to the civilian work sector was critical to their progression. The current research noted that transitions are assimilated into one's life, and a key facet of this adjustment is cultivating a range of strategies for adaption (Anderson et al., 2012). This category of participants actively sought out advice and guidance from anyone who could help with their transition in both the military and civilian sectors. Grow (1991) proposed that learners who are highly self-directed set their own goals and use experts, institutions, and other resources to prepare for tasks or transitions. They reported that being highly self-directed gave them

more clarity on what they wanted to do and how to prepare, and it also limited the amount of fear due to uncertainty when they experienced transition (Peterson, Sampson, & Reardon, 1991).

Although anticipated transitioned veterans expressed challenges in the civilian work sector, they also explained how they were resilient in those situations. Participants reported that working through difficult situations was doable because they relied on their hard work ethic and attention to detail that civilian employers did not normally see in their employees. It was those attributes that they stated set them apart from everyone else and provided a sense of accomplishment in their new roles. Fiske and Chiriboga (1990) theorized that achievement and work are the foundation of an individual's basic values and belief in their ability to assimilate to transitions.

Summary of Analysis

To recap, the analysis of the research findings revealed that separated enlisted service members experiences career transition by becoming self-directed when recognizing assistance from military leadership was minimal; adapting to change using their military experience, a TAP class, and networking with battle buddies or family members; and acknowledging that preparation and acclimation to the civilian work sector were needed. The essence of the veterans' personal experiences was categorized into two analytic categories: anticipated and unanticipated transitions.

Aligning with the thematic topics, the categories differed by the unanticipated transitioned veterans' inability to become self-directed during transition, whereas the anticipated veterans adjusted better due to early planning. They also differed in their willingness to adapt to change because the anticipated transitioned veterans shared that

they learned how to transition in various ways and from multiple sources. On the other hand, unanticipated veterans struggled with adapting because they were still accustomed to the military structures. Both anticipated and unanticipated transitioned veterans found value in networking with a battle buddy or a family member. Lastly, acknowledging the need for preparation and assimilation to the civilian sector was different for the two because anticipated transitioned veterans reported being highly self-directed and using resiliency in challenging situations. They also accepted that change was inevitable for them to be successful. That differed from the unanticipated transitioned veterans because they feared change and struggled with adjusting to the civilian work culture after coming from the structured military life.

Discussion and Interpretation

This section interprets the meaning behind the analysis using the two analytic categories of unanticipated and anticipated transitioned veterans derived from the findings. Moreover, through the context of the three thematic topics, the researcher offers insights into the meaning making of the participants by supporting synthesis from the transition and adult learning literature.

Thematic Topic 1

Becoming self-directed when recognizing assistance from military leadership is minimal.

Unanticipated transition. Unanticipated veterans were not self-directed. Instead of adjusting to civilian life and self-governing their transition, they believed somebody would eventually tell them what to do as the military had once done. Essentially, they

were looking for a teacher or authority figure to ensure they would be okay in each step of the transition process. Tennant and Pogson (1995) contended that the socially constructed nature of self and knowledge may also limit adults' capacity for autonomy and self-directedness in learning and situations may have occurred where others around them determine what is worth knowing and how that knowledge should be used.

This group of veterans shared that the lack of support from their military leadership severely hindered them when they were transitioning to the civilian work sector. As a result, they failed to identify and prepare for all of the endings and losses that came with separating from the military. They lacked coping strategies and the ability to adapt to new ways and develop identities, unlike those previously held in the military. Hobfoll (2011) noted that a productive coping strategy may work in one situation but not in another because the adult believes there is a significant loss that threaten one's sense of self.

Anticipated transition. The anticipated veterans were highly self-directed and always held themselves accountable for their transition experience. This level of accountability included them being proactive about civilian jobs and military transition paperwork as well as addressing any weakness that would hinder their transition progress. They were highly motivated throughout the process of transitioning, despite lack of support from their military leadership. Additionally, even when they experienced personal or professional problems, they were resilient and optimistic about their future. These participants developed a contextual awareness of how their personal transition fit into the civilian work sector (Watts, 2004).

Anticipated transitioned veterans sought out assistance from anyone who would serve as a positive resource or source of information for them. It was a combination of

confidence and openness to change that came with positively reintegrating into a new culture that this group of veterans willingly embraced. When veterans in this group were experiencing transition, it did not feel like a crisis, and so they were able to composedly use previous life experiences to help them move through each step of the process (Anderson et al., 2012). Ultimately, they were able to come out of their military transition and make a new beginning by discovering an alternate sense of purpose (Bridges, 2009).

In Figure 9, Grow's (1991) model explains the different stages of teaching self-directed learners. Unanticipated transitioned veterans are thought to be in stages 1 and 2, whereas anticipated transitioned veterans are thought to be in stages 3 and 4.

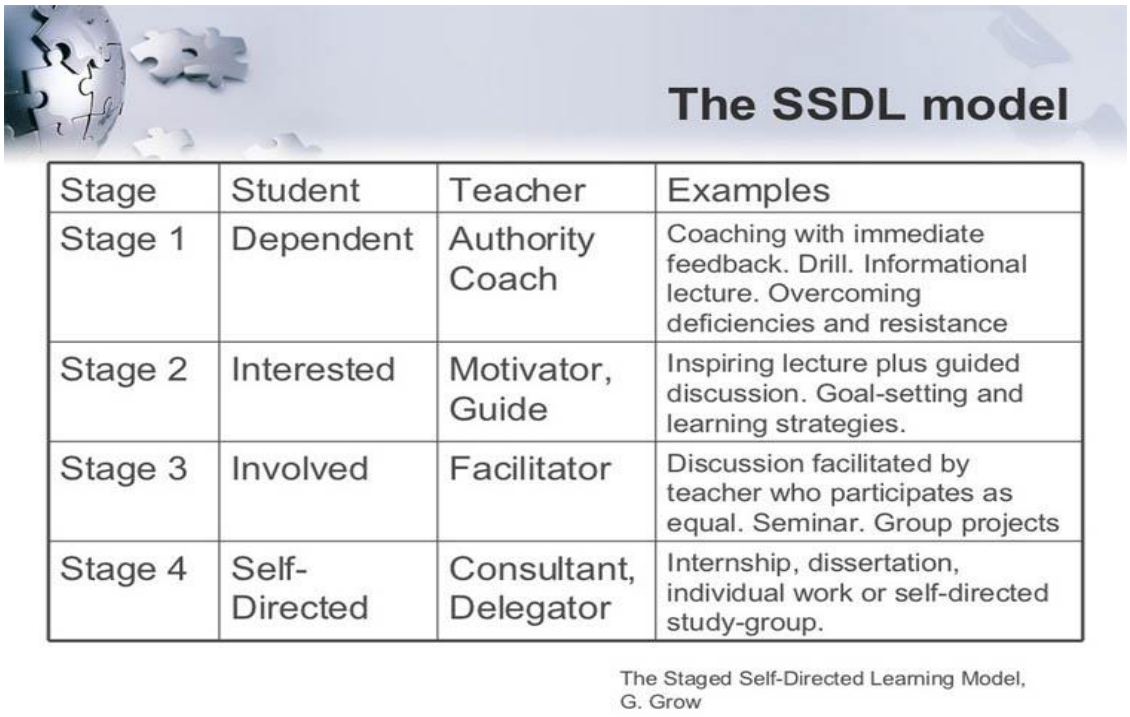

Figure 9. SSDL model (retrieved from Teach Thought, 2017)

Thematic Topic 2

Adapting to change using military experience, a TAP class, and networking with battle buddies and family members

Unanticipated transition. Unanticipated transitioned veterans did not appear to understand everything that encompassed adapting to the civilian work sector. They seemed unmotivated and sometimes unwilling to prepare for their transition because of all the ambiguity surrounding their future. The overwhelming fear of transition seemed to paralyze the many skill sets they learned while serving in the military, including discipline and resiliency. The structure of the TAP class was especially difficult for them because they did not retain most of the information. Moreover, with the class being only a week long, its format was set up for participants who were more self-directed and needed minimal instruction along the way.

Anticipated transition. As a result of the anticipated transitioned veterans being open to change in various aspects, they accepted that adaptability was essential and using their military experience, the TAP class, and networking with battle buddies and friends would only make their reintegration more seamless. They aspired to have success in their civilian careers and used the knowledge they obtained from the military to help them advance in the civilian sector. These veterans had prepared themselves for transition even when TAP resources were not completely adequate by being proactive about their futures. Additionally, they strove to learn both directly and indirectly from battle buddies and family members. One of the primary disparities between the two groups of participants was the anticipated veterans' capacity to make meaning out of their transition experience. They analyzed and critically reflected on the assumptions and beliefs that

accompanied meaning making in the past with the military and quickly realized they were no longer sufficient (English, 2005). Through this lens of focusing on their present and future, they learned to overcome obstacles expeditiously.

Both anticipated and unanticipated transitioned veterans believed battle buddies and family members were assets in their transition. However, unanticipated veterans still grappled with using them effectively when they experienced challenges or lacked specific information to which they may be privy. To the contrary, anticipated veterans were able to use all of the resources to their benefit when transitioning. Anderson et al.'s (2012) account of transitions determined that in order for people to cope effectively, they need to use a variety of strategies, incorporate stress management, and potentially rearrange priorities with their resources.

Thematic Topic 3

Acknowledging that preparation and acclimation to the civilian work sector are needed.

Unanticipated transition. Unlike the anticipated transitioned veterans, the unanticipated transitioned veterans were not sufficiently prepared for the civilian sector. As a result of not developing a self-directing plan for their transition, they feared transition to the civilian sector. Fear arose from different ways including not knowing how to write a resume or find a job, losing their military identity, and even facing the unknown. Their transition omitted the psychological portion that depended on them letting go of old realities and identities (Bridges, 2009). This omission resulted in an unmanaged transition that made acclimation unmanageable.

The civilian work structure was highly frustrating for the unanticipated transitioned veterans. They were accustomed to being told what to do and struggled when they had to make decisions independently or formulate a self-reliant plan (Anderson et al., 2012). The organizational hierarchy made it difficult to assimilate and would result in feelings of anger and dismay about their career transition. For the most part, these feelings only complicated the process because now these participants had to deal with a new set of emotional barriers, all of which were unknown to them when they were in the military.

Anticipated transition. Foresight put anticipated transitioned veterans in the best position to manage their own career transition. Anticipated transitioned veterans made time for themselves to be self-directed so they were assured to have multiple options when transitioning. They utilized resources, set intentions, and materialized their future by anticipating future challenges within the civilian sector. They appeared to be more enthusiastic about their civilian career prospects. Anticipated transitioned veterans were able to articulate their problems concisely with civilian employers and make the necessary adjustments by exceeding their work expectations, thus resulting in better acclimation in the new work environment. As Schlossberg and Robinson (1996) recommended, "Adults should have a "Plan B" because in today's world, it is wise to be prepared for change. Adults who take that advice when faced with a career transition have more control than those who are unprepared" (p. 170).

Summary of Analysis, Synthesis, and Interpretation

The researcher analyzed the findings and offered reflections on and insights into the veterans' explanations of how they experienced transition. For continuity, a reiteration

of the major findings of this research is as follows: (a) the majority of veterans indicated that because their leadership did not provide adequate support when they transitioned, they had to be self-directed in their learning; (b) veterans indicated that the military TAP class was the most helpful resource when they transitioned, but it needed major changes so they used their military experiences obtained from the military to transition; (c) veterans described a battle buddy or a family member as a positive influence in helping them transition to the civilian world; (d) the majority of veterans reported having challenges with their civilian employers when they transitioned out of the military.

Two analytical categories derived from this research included anticipated and unanticipated transitioned veterans. When reviewing and reflecting on the findings, three major themes emerged from how participants responded, including: their ability to become self-directed when recognizing assistance from leadership was minimal; adapting to change using military experience, a TAP class, and networking with battle buddies or family members; and acknowledging that preparation and assimilation to the civilian work sector are needed. According to the analytic categories, through the lens of the three thematic topics, the two qualitative groups were different according to their military transition experiences and overall ability to be resilient.

A separated enlisted veteran's experiences of career transition after leaving active duty to enter the civilian work sector are tremendously impacted by their ability to be self-directed in the process and resilient when challenges emanate. Veterans with a high level of resiliency and willingness to adapt to change normally planned prior to separating and followed through with their goals post-military. Veterans who were not

adaptable or open to change were mentally in conflict with the transition process and did not maximize all of the resources afforded to them.

Revisiting Assumptions

The researcher began this study in Chapter I with a set of assumptions prior to knowing what the findings would be in the previous chapter or what the analysis, synthesis, and interpretation would be in this chapter.

The first assumption was that all veterans experience challenges with career transition and reintegration in the civilian world/workforce. While this was correct, the veteran participants all reported experiencing some type of challenge, but their responses to it varied.

The second assumption was that veterans experience some form of learning during their career transition. This was correct but the learning experiences varied between the two qualitative groups. Veterans learned a multitude of things including adapting to change, being self-directed, and dealing with host of tangible elements like learning how to write a resume. Additionally, the researcher viewed this assumption as positive; however, one could deduce that the veterans also learned adverse actions regarding their transition.

The third assumption was that veterans' career transition experiences are influenced by their military background. This was not true for all veterans. Some veterans were able to incorporate their military background into their civilian transition and use the skills they obtained to their benefit, whereas others were hindered by it.

The fourth and last assumption was that civilian employers are often uninformed about the depths of work experience veterans have from military and previous careers. This was true for how all veterans felt about working with civilians. All of the participants reported that working in the civilian sector involved them engaging with co-workers, bosses, and constituents who had no idea of the extent of their versatile experience.

Contributions to the Literature

This qualitative inquiry examined the learning experiences of 15 military veterans who transitioned from active duty to the civilian work sector and served in either the U.S. Army, Navy, Coast Guard, or Air Force. Furthermore, it explored how they perceived the process of transitioning as separated enlisted veterans. This study made three primary contributions to the literature of adult learning and military transitions.

The researcher began this study by not being aware of any academic literature on how separated enlisted veterans experience transition after leaving active duty and going into the civilian workforce. In the literature search, a majority of the findings surrounded military officers and/or retirees leaving service. Although insightful, they did not address the learning experiences or challenges faced by the most vulnerable population in terms of unemployment (Carter-Boyd, 2012). In addition, the literature found that military officer retirees deduced that programs like the TAP class should be optional versus mandatory. From this deduction, the researcher inferred that the importance of transition programs to leadership may not be a top priority for military leaders. Thus, providing research on the lived experiences of enlisted service members and highlighting their

challenges when transitioning provided a foundation towards new literature on this phenomenon.

Second, this study contributed more understanding of what essential elements are needed for veterans when they transition to the civilian work sector. Elements needed are being more self-directed, utilizing a multitude of resources (both military and non), and preparing for transition as early as possible. Schlossberg (2004) recognized that adults are more likely to manage their transition better if they remain open to change and use multiple strategies. This research noted that many veterans may not be managing their military transition well, although all service members will have to transition at some point in time. Seeing that adults can develop into becoming more comfortable with transitions at varying times in the process, having solid groundwork in these particular elements is pivotal for their development (Bridges, 2009).

The third contribution this research provided to the literature was a better understanding of how some veterans learned to overcome and why some struggle more than others. It provided insight into specific problems within the military and civilian structures, as told by separated enlisted veterans. It was revealed that resiliency is not something that all veterans have when they transition, but those who are intentional and methodical about the process are more likely to be successful. Goodman et al. (2006) specified that a person's resilience with transitions is dependent upon their resources. Veterans have been notoriously known to struggle with transitioning back to the civilian work sector, and this research strove to fill the gap for a specific demographic within the military structure (Carter-Boyd, 2012; Petrovich, 2012).

Researcher Reflections

When I began this research, I envisioned a very linear process in my deeper understanding of how enlisted service members experience transition. Moreover, I wanted to understand why some veterans have an easier time transitioning than others. Unbeknownst to me, there would be several gaps between the beginning chapters and surprises from the findings. Currently, I work in the field of military education and serve as a part of the civilian population that is tasked with ensuring that soldiers receive education benefits to prepare them for current and future career goals. I kept a journal during this process to help me reflect on what I was assuming about this population based on my work experience and what I was actually hearing them say. In addition, what I was going through personally throughout the years and how that affected my research were also documented.

During my last few classes, my dad passed away and it was one of the hardest things I have ever dealt with. It is easy to question so many things about life during grieving and maintaining clarity can often be a challenge. Something that has always stayed in the back of my head is how I got to this stage in my life where I am pursuing a dissertation and blessed to have a successful career working for the military. Before I was born, my dad was a veteran who served during the Vietnam War era. He never talked about it too much when I was younger, but I knew he was proud of his service because he had tons of pictures and a framed DD214 (verification of service form). When I became an adult, I asked him many different questions about why he enlisted in the Army and what his experiences were like. He was always excited to tell me about it as I was always eager to hear about his experiences when he was my age. What stood out to me was that

when he separated from the military, he did not have an education higher than junior high school, but he was smart and a hard worker, so much so that he ended up obtaining a good job, worked his way up financially, and supported a family of four successfully, all the while coming from very humble beginnings.

The connection I found with how I arrived at this stage of my life was through the veterans I interviewed. They came from similar backgrounds as my father did, with no formal education. Although I often counseled service members when they were on active duty, this was the first time I had a chance to talk to them about their experience after they got out. I had raw and fascinating conversations listening to how they processed their experience of transition. I felt a similar enthusiasm, wanting to hear more as I did when I was speaking with my father. As I reflected and journaled more throughout the dissertation, I wanted to make more of an impact in the daily lives of the soldiers with whom I currently work. Specifically, I wanted to help create more programs that can address this gap which is filled with the uncertainty and fear of change some service members reported during their transition.

I was surprised by how many participants reported how the civilian population takes their military experiences and sacrifices to this country for granted. One of the veterans I interviewed said, “Everybody supports the troops until it’s actually time to support the troops.” His statement was uncomfortably true because it is easy to say this thought in a conversation or post it on social media, but when people are in a situation to really do what they say, they rarely follow through. Having worked with and been raised by an enlisted veteran, I know that veterans are some of the hardest working people in

this world. In understanding their experiences and backgrounds, it becomes apparent that any organization in either the private or the public sector could use their skill sets.

It was also surprising to hear so many participants express that they experienced a lack of military leadership when they were transitioning. The term “no man left behind” comes to mind, and hearing them express that camaraderie ended when they decided to leave the military was astonishing. In some ways, I think they eventually found the assistance they were looking for from a battle buddy or another veteran, but I empathized with them having the feeling of not being wanted by an organization for whom they had sacrificed so much. In my reflections, I noted that sometimes there is a mentality of “we can’t reach everyone” in the military educator community. Perhaps a shift in perspective is needed so that the goal is not to reach everyone; rather, the focus is easy access to and comprehension of the information veterans need. I think this shift can be the fundamental change needed to make a genuine difference in how military leaders and educators assist service members with transitioning.

Chapter VI

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This final chapter includes the conclusions drawn from the research, recommendations for military educators and transitioning veterans, and further research in the field of military transition. The researcher drew three conclusions based on the findings and interpretations of this qualitative inquiry.

Conclusion 1

The veterans in this study showed that they have different levels of self-direction when transitioning to the civilian work sector. Veterans who are able to be more self-directing when they did not have assistance began transitioning early and embraced the change of a civilian career. For service members to become more self-directed, they need to accept that they are separating from the military, trust and know they will receive assistance, and be more proactive about their transition process. Moreover, they must recognize what areas in their transition require them to be more self-directed and believe they have the ability to be resilient when problems arise.

With the above understanding, military leaders and educators cannot expect that all service members will be adept in the transition process and all of the available resources. Leaders and educators in the military population must assist with helping

service members identify what areas need development and realistic timelines for transition. In addition, the respective services need to ensure that all of the leaders and those tasked with advising service members with transition are fully committed to their success.

Conclusion 2

Veterans are able to better adapt to change if they utilize battle buddies, family networks, and military experiences when they transition to the civilian work sector. Adapting to a new work and life environment can be less intimidating if veterans see their battle buddies have already been through the process. Additionally, they serve as great resources for networking because they understand what they are going through and can provide reliable contacts for the transitioning service member. Family members can also serve in a similar capacity as battle buddies for networking, in addition to providing a moral support system. Reflecting on military experience is essential to their adaptation to change. Their military experience has taught them resiliency from the time they joined the service, trainings completed in preparation for war, and being deployed to a war zone and returning home safely. Tapping into this experience as a resource for change can put their transition into perspective as they acclimate to the civilian work sector.

Conclusion 3

Being self-directed is not an option for transitioning service members but a necessity for their development. While every service member may have a different starting point or level of being self-directed, everyone needs to be a part of the process for their own change. Planning as soon as possible is the best method to ensure all of their

military documents are in order, and that they have up-to-date resumes, know of available job opportunities, meet education requirements, and are aware of all the veteran benefits afforded to them. Early preparation also allows veterans to make fewer mistakes along the way during transition because they are able to do adequate research on subjects with which they do not have any experience with or reach out to one of their networks for assistance. Moreover, understanding the importance of formulating a plan prior to transitioning is critical for limiting the challenges veterans face when transitioning from active duty to the civilian workforce.

Recommendations

The researcher offers recommendations for military leadership and educators who are tasked with assisting service members with transitioning to the civilian world. In addition, the researcher offers three recommendations for transitioning veterans and provides recommendations for further research.

Recommendations for Military Leadership

1. *Advocate for quality training programs*

Working with recruiters to manage where a service member is in their contract can provide better insight into whether they are thinking about transitioning out. Using the feedback from this study, if a service member is serving on a 4-year contract, then branches can offer 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year TAP classes. The first year of service is going to basic training and learning their military job. After their first year of service, they can be put on a development plan that gives them education options, civilian careers within that scope, and self-development skills that would be beneficial for both the military and

for their personal lives. The key would be ensuring they are given adequate time for personal development while still being mission-focused. The second-year development plan can go further into personal development to include managing stress, resiliency training (preparation for the civilian world challenges, not the military course), and other mental/emotional health-related disciplines. Extensive research has been done on emotional intelligence, which, when managed effectively, can have positive outcomes on communication and leadership skills. The third- and fourth-year development plan can begin to focus more on military benefits, managing transitions, and applying for civilian jobs for those who are interested. Given the many different benefits within the active duty military field and veterans' affairs office, it is easy to get lost on eligibility or each program's options so early learning could be critical. Within this structure, military branches could have interactive sessions or guest speakers to include prior veterans who have served to tell their stories of transition, as well as education and job fairs, academic consultants to conduct personal development trainings, and more involvement from military leaders to show they want to see their troops succeed.

2. *Ask current service members what they need*

Consider doing a needs assessment with a focus on transitioning service members and creating programs around those needs. Everyone in the military realm understands mission comes first; however, taking care of service members is essential. Military morale is always a top priority and troops who believe that someone cares about their future can have a true boost to their confidence. Both military leaders and educators can work together to create and manage each service member to make certain everyone has access and knowledge of what is available to them when transitioning. As Bridges (2009)

noted, “There is no one good way to manage everyone, yet everyone can be managed in such a way that they increase in their ability to be more self-managing” (p. 6).

3. Make changes from the top down

Every branch of the military has a set of core values and at least one of them involves selfless service and/or commitment to duty. A part of that duty is to take care of one another and that can include making sure fellow service members have access to quality programs. All of the core values in the military are continuously advocated by senior leaders and enforced by subordinate leaders below for continuity throughout the organization. Branches of service can reinforce their commitment to service members by emphasizing that they are joining a brotherhood/sisterhood that does not end when they separate; rather, it prepares them for greater duties upon completion of service. Considering how major changes that affect regulation and policies in the military realm are done from the top down, when senior military leadership concurs that more needs to be done for transitioning soldiers, then modifications or inclusions to existing programs can be made.

4. Foster better relationships with the Veterans Affairs office

Fostering better relationships with local Veteran Affairs office can assist service members who have already transitioned to manage their reintegration better. Consider offering quarterly trainings that include an active duty personnel representative, military education counselors, and a veteran’s affairs representative to serve as a refresher class for service members who have transitioned. The veterans in this study as well as in other research expressed getting misinformation when they had to work with multiple sources on the same information, so putting all the subject matter experts together may alleviate

that problem. Transitioning service members need to grasp much new information as they adapt to their new environment, and indeed it can be difficult process for some. Having support and a positive relationship with the Veterans Affairs office would be a valuable resource for transitioning service members.

Recommendations for Transitioning Service Members

1. *Manage your own success*

No one knows what is best for an adult better than the adult himself or herself. service members move towards transitioning out of the military, they have to make learning a priority for their development. This includes being proactive about completing necessary military paperwork before transitioning and obtaining college or certifications that can be used in the civilian work sector. Additionally, networking and figuring out what post-military career they would like to pursue should be their sole responsibility. Transitioning service members should accept that challenges are likely and not dwell on perceived failures, but instead accept the process of new beginnings. Accepting the process of change allows them to focus on learning something in every situation, whether it is favorable or not. In managing their own success, the veterans are afforded the ability to have a sense of accomplishment in this and other endeavors in their life.

2. *Don't be afraid to ask questions or seek help*

Every successful person has had some type of mentor or assistance in the pursuit of accomplishing a goal. Transitioning to civilian life can be an arduous journey; however, having the understanding that other service members were able to adapt can give confidence to future veterans. That confidence can be translated into using resources, as outlined in this study, to include battle buddies and family members. Utilize

an education services officer at the closest military base/facility as well as guidance counselors, transition assistance program specialists, and career counselors, because most are experienced military educators who are eager to answer questions and serve as constant advisors.

3. *Believe in yourself*

Most transitioning service members have experienced equal or more difficult circumstances in their life. Although different service members have varying levels of stress when they transition, having the belief that they can get through a transition to the civilian sector because this is minimal compared to what they have already been through provides additional courage to endure any setbacks. Reflecting on how they completed boot camp, endured a long military school, survived deployments, or even fulfilled deadlines that seemed unlikely but were nonetheless met can give insight into just how much mental strength veterans have to be the best version of themselves.

Recommendations for Further Research

1. *Expand the research population*

By far, the military is one of the most diverse organizations in the world and its brotherhood/sisterhood mentality is unmatched. Essentially, one must trust the person to the left and right with one's life, and the pettiness seen in other businesses is easily overlooked in the military. However, like most organizations, more work still needs to be done. Given that the majority of the participants in this research were African American, we openly spoke about how some of the current systems and structures are not necessarily meant for them to be successful. The researcher was unable to make any connections with transition challenges or successes based on race because this was a

small sample. Additional research with an expanded population can potentially show any significant differences in how people of varying racial, ethnic, or gender experience transition.

2. *Additional research on motivation and success factors*

Research on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors of transitioning service members that contribute to a veteran's success would be helpful in understanding a different aspect of how they experience transitions. Additionally, it would provide insights into what influences their desire to learn and be self-directed in the process.

3. *Phenomenological research on extreme cases of transition*

The researcher believes there are two spectrums of extreme cases of military transitions to the civilian sector. One spectrum would be a homeless veteran and the other a successful veteran in terms of monetary gain, being in the top 1%t of the population. Understanding each one of these types of participants' perception and experience of transitioning can provide an in-depth look into each case and potentially provide a best practice from this phenomenon of military transition.

4. *Research on what classifies a successful military transition*

A successful military transition is subjective in terms of what classifies being successful and, of course, who is asked. Therefore, using a qualitative framework from the authentic happiness theory and how service members experience transition can provide insight into what is needed to put them in the best position to have joy when they reintegrate into the civilian work sector. Joy is defined as a deep-rooted happiness that is unbothered by worldly conditions. In this instance, the need to have an unreachable work salary or important civilian work title is replaced by emotional and spiritual fulfillment.

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Appendix A

Letter to Participants (Individual)

Teachers College, Columbia University
Adult Learning and Organizational Leadership

Dear Veteran,

I would like to invite you to participate in my research study, "US Military Veterans: An Exploratory Interview Study of the Learning Experiences of Separated enlisted Military Personnel Transitioning from Active Duty to the Civilian Workforce."

I am a doctoral student at Teachers College, Columbia University in the Adult Learning and Organizational Leadership department and completion of this research will be a part of the process in satisfying my degree requirements. Currently, I'm an Education Services Specialist working for the ARMY National Guard in which I counsel soldiers on an array of educational pursuits and preparation for transition out of the military. Service members separate from the military for a multitude of reasons and majority have to deal with the transition of working in the civilian sector. Therefore, I am conducting this research to learn more about how enlisted, personnel experience transition and what successes or hindrances they had along the way.

The research will consist of one interview that will last no more than 60 minutes and will provide the participants the opportunity to share their experiences with transitioning from the military to the civilian workforce. Your name and personal information will not be used in any part of this research. All veterans will be assigned a pseudonym and will only be referred to as that on all of the interview documentation as well as the research paper.

Thank you for your consideration and support. If you have any questions, please contact me at 302-597-6345 or via email at nbm2118@columbia.edu

Sincerely,

Nicole Morant

Appendix B

Letter to Participants (Focus Group)

Teachers College, Columbia University
Adult Learning and Organizational Leadership

Dear Veteran,

I would like to invite you to participate in my research study, "US Military Veterans: An Exploratory Interview Study of the Learning Experiences of Separated enlisted Military Personnel Transitioning from Active Duty to the Civilian Workforce."

I am a doctoral student at Teachers College, Columbia University in the Adult Learning and Organizational Leadership department and completion of this research will be a part of the process in satisfying my degree requirements. Currently, I'm an Education Services Specialist working for the ARMY National Guard in which I counsel soldiers on an array of educational pursuits and preparation for transition out of the military. Service members separate from the military for a multitude of reasons and majority have to deal with the transition of working in the civilian sector. Therefore, I am conducting this research to learn more about how enlisted, personnel experience transition and what successes or hindrances they had along the way.

The research will consist of one interview that will last no more than 90 minutes and will provide the participants the opportunity to share their experiences with transitioning from the military to the civilian workforce. Your name and personal information will not be used in any part of this research. All veterans will be assigned a pseudonym and will only be referred to as that on all of the interview documentation as well as the research paper.

Thank you for your consideration and support. If you have any questions, please contact me at 302-597-6345 or via email at nbm2118@columbia.edu

Sincerely,

Nicole Morant

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

Dear Veteran,

Thank you for your participation in the upcoming interviews for the study "US Military Veterans: An Exploratory Interview Study of the Learning Experiences of Separated enlisted Military Personnel Transitioning from Active Duty to the Civilian Workforce."

Risks:

There risks related to this study is relatively limited. Since you will be sharing your personal experiences of transition some uncomfortable experiences may be discussed. Your experiences maybe used to help develop recommendations for future military to civilian career transition programs.

Benefits:

The benefits of this study are learning more about how enlisted service members experience military to civilian career transition. Potentially, providing recommendations for future research and/or a better understanding of how to properly prepare the selected group of veterans for a smoother transition.

Confidentiality:

Tape recording is a part of this research and will only be accessible to the researcher and her academic advisor. None of your personally identifiable information (PII) will be shared with anyone else in any part of this research without your written consent. You will be assigned a non-identifying number and will only be referred to as such for the purposes of this research.

Rights:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntarily and you may withdraw your request to interview with me at any time. You also have a right to privacy.

Authorization:

My signature confirms that I agree to participate in this study.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Print Name: _____

Phone/Email: _____

Appendix D

Interview Protocol and Questions

Research Question:

How do separated enlisted service members experience career transition after leaving active duty and going into the civilian workforce?

Sub-questions deriving from the main research question are:

1. How do veterans describe their transition from active duty to the civilian workforce?

2. What type of resources and career skills were utilized by veteran's pre or post transition to the civilian workforce?

3. What challenges do veterans experience during their transition from active duty to the civilian workforce?

4. What personal and professional influences do veterans describe as an advantage or disadvantage during the reintegration process?

Participant #_____

Date:

Location:

Opening question:

- Tell me about yourself: previous military experience, education and/or work experience.

Research sub-question 1: Transition Experience

- How would you describe the military transition process when you were separating from Active Duty? Probe 1: How could it have been better?
- What are some of the most important things you learned that assisted you with your career transition to the civilian sector? Probe 1: How did you learn about these things?
- Describe your experience working with civilians in the civilian sector? Probe 1: What do you think are some of the key differences when working with civilians?

Probe 2: How did/do you make adjustments in making things work that were a challenge?

Research sub-question 2: Military Transition Resources

- Describe the most helpful resource(s) in the military for you when you were transitioning? Probe: How did you find out about them and how did you use the resources?
- Were there any significant people (battle buddy, supervisor, civilian, family member/friend) who helped you transition? Probe: Explain what they did or say to assist you?
- Did you attend a TAP class? Probe 1: If so how many and what was your experience? Probe 2: Did you participate in any other programs geared to help you transition out of the military and learn about your military benefits?
- How did you decide on what career to pursue after you separated from the military? Probe 1: Please explain and was this your first choice? Probe 2: Are you happy with your decision?
- How confident did you feel about transitioning given the resources and opportunities afforded to you? Probe 1: Elaborate. Probe 2: What could have made you feel more comfortable?

Research sub-question 3: Challenges of Reintegration

- What factors affected your decision to separate from the military? Probe 1: Please give me some examples. Probe 2: On the other hand, is there anything that you miss?
- What challenges did you face when you were transitioning out of the military? Probe 1: please give me some examples. Probe 2: Do you think this was a common problem amongst service members? Probe 3: Could these issues have been avoided, if so, how?
- How have you been able to incorporate your military training and education experience into your transition to the civilian workforce?
- Describe what you think are the major challenges service members experience when they transition and why?
- What do you think are the major things service members need in order to have a successful transition?

Research sub-question 4: Personal & Professional Influences

- How would you describe the professional (career) development opportunities offered by the military (certifications, A& C schools, MOS/AIT school house

classes)? Probe 1: free/affordable; array of fields; time to complete; civilian transferrable? Probe 2: Did it apply to your civilian career in any way?

- How would you describe the education opportunities offered by the military? Probe 1: free/affordable; array of fields; time to complete; civilian transferrable? Probe 2: Did it apply to your civilian career in any way?
- What kinds of support did you have when you were transitioning from Active Duty to the civilian work sector? Probe 1: command/unit support or family/friends support?
- Where there any significant person(s) that assisted with your career transition (family, supervisor, etc)? Probe 1: What did they do or help with exactly? Probe 2: If you had to do everything yourself, take me through the steps or things you had to learn on your own in order to transition?

Conclusion: Thank you for your service and for the taking the time to tell me about your experiences with career transition.

- Is there anything else you would like to add about military career transitions?

Appendix E

Focus Group Protocol and Questions

Research Question:

How do separated enlisted service members experience career transition after leaving active duty and going into the civilian workforce?

Sub-questions deriving from the main research question are:

1. How do veterans describe their transition from active duty to the civilian workforce?

2. What type of resources and career skills were utilized by veteran's pre or post transition to the civilian workforce?

3. What challenges do veterans experience during their transition from active duty to the civilian workforce?

4. What personal and professional influences do veterans describe as an advantage or disadvantage during the reintegration process?

- How would you describe the military transition process when you were separating from Active Duty? Probe 1: How could it have been better?
- Describe your experience working with civilians in the civilian sector? Probe 1: What do you think are some of the key differences when working with civilians? Probe 2: How did/do you make adjustments in making things work that were a challenge?
- Describe the most helpful resource(s) in the military for you when you were transitioning? Probe: How did you find out about them and how did you use the resources?
- How confident did you feel about transitioning given the resources and opportunities afforded to you? Probe 1: Elaborate. Probe 2: What could have made you feel more comfortable?
- What factors affected your decision to separate from the military? Probe 1: Please give me some examples. Probe 2: On the other hand, is there anything that you miss?
- Describe what you think are the major challenges service members experience when they transition and why?
- How would you describe the education and professional development opportunities offered by the military? Probe 1: free/affordable; array of fields;

time to complete; civilian transferrable? Probe 2: Did it apply to your civilian career in any way?

- What kinds of support did you have when you were transitioning from Active Duty to the civilian work sector? Probe 1: command/unit support or family/friends support?

Appendix F

Demographic Inventory

Background Information

Participant _____ Ethnicity/Race_____

Branch of Military_____ Age_____

Years of Service_____ Gender_____

Single or Married_____ Do you have children?_____

Military Experience

Military (MOS/RATE) Job_____ Date of Separation (DD214) _____

Reasons for joining the military: _____serve your country

_____education benefits

_____enjoys military job/field

_____family tradition

Did you have an OIF/OEF/or related deployment after September 11, 2001? _____ How many?____

Work Experience

- *Current Employment:*

Current Occupation_____

Date you started (Month/Year) _____

Is this full-time, medical benefits earning employment? _____

- *Previous Work Experience:*

How many jobs did you have after you separated from the military till now? _____

How many were full-time, medical benefits earning employment? _____

Education Experience

How many college credits (Associates/Bachelors level) do you have? _____

Highest Education Degree Completed? (i.e. H.S. Diploma, Associates, Bachelors, etc.)

_____

Did you attend a TAP (Transition Assistance Program) class prior to separation? ____ How many? _____

Appendix G

Coding Scheme

1. Veteran conceptualization of experience transitioning from active duty to the civilian workforce
   1a. Lack of Readiness
   1b. Struggles with Adapting
   1c. Limited support from Leadership
   1d. Need to be Self-directed
   1e. Ability to Change
   1f. Not Prepared to Transition
   1g. Prepared to Transition

2. Resources and influences that assisted with overcoming challenges faced during transition to the civilian workforce
   2a. TAP Class
   2b. Civilian Assistance
   2c. Self-Motivated
   2d. College Degree
   2e. Reflection on Military Experience
   2f. Certifications/Credentials

3. Challenges veterans faced during their transition
   3a. Lack of support
   3b. Lack of resources
   3c. Fear of Change
   3d. Limited opportunities for advancement
   3e. Lack of structure/discipline in civilian sector
   3f. Civilian employer issues
   3g. Overall difficult transition
   3h. Overall smooth transition

4. Personal and professional influences
   4a. Peers/Battle Buddies
   4b. Other Veterans
   4c. Military Leadership
   4d. Family
   4e. Friends
   4f. Civilian Influences

Appendix H

Distribution Table, Finding #1

Conceptualization of Transition Experience

Participant Names	Lack of Readiness	Struggles with adapting	Limited Support from Leadership	Need to be Self-Directed	Ability to Change	Not Prepared to Transition	Prepared to Transition
Anthony Wallace	X		X	X		X	
Casey Kukoc			X	X		X	
Elliott Davis	X	X	X	X		X	
Cody Haywood					X		X
Cheryl Staley	X	X	X	X		X	
Jeremy Bogues	X	X	X	X		X	
Abdul Scott	X	X	X	X			X
Averre Jordan			X	X	X	X	
Rheuben O'neal		X	X	X		X	
Lisa Roberts				X			X
Lebron Fisher					X		X
John Curry	X	X	X	X		X	
Jason Barnes			X	X	X	X	
Tyrone Korver				X	X		X
Mark Jackson				X	X		X
Total percentages:	40%	40%	67%	87%	40%	60%	40%

Appendix I

Distribution Table, Finding #2

Military Transition Resources

Participant Names	TAP Class	Civilian Assistance	Self-Motivated	College Degree	Reflection on Military Experience	Certifications/Credentials
Anthony Wallace	X				X	
Casey Kukoc			X		X	
Elliott Davis	X				X	
Cody Haywood	X	X			X	
Cheryl Staley					X	
Jeremy Bogues	X				X	
Abdul Scott	X				X	
Averre Jordan	X		X		X	
Rheuben O'neal	X				X	
Lisa Roberts				X	X	
Lebron Fisher	X		X		X	
John Curry	X				X	X
Jason Barnes	X	X	X		X	X
Tyrone Korver	X		X	X	X	
Mark Jackson	X		X	X	X	
Total percentages:	73%	13%	40%	20%	100%	13%

Appendix J

Distribution Table, Finding #3

Challenges to Military Transition

Participant Names	Lack of Support	Lack of Resources	Fear of Change	Limited Oppt. for Advancement	Lack of Discipline in Civilian Sector	Civilian Employer Issues	Overall Difficult Transition	Overall Smooth Transition
Anthony Wallace			X		X	X		X
Casey Kukoc			X		X	X		
Elliott Davis	X	X	X		X	X	X	
Cody Haywood			X		X	X		
Cheryl Staley	X	X	X		X	X	X	
Jeremy Bogues			X	X	X	X		
Abdul Scott			X		X	X		
Averre Jordan					X	X		X
Rheuben O'neal	X		X		X	X		
Lisa Roberts			X		X	X		
Lebron Fisher			X		X	X		X
John Curry	X		X	X	X	X	X	
Jason Barnes	X		X	X	X	X		
Tyrone Korver				X	X	X		
Mark Jackson								X
Total percentages:	33%	13%	80%	27%	93%	93%	20%	27%

Appendix K

Distribution Table, Finding #4

Personal and Professional Influences

Participant Names	Peers/Battle Buddies	Other Veterans	Military Leadership	Family	Friends	Civilian Influence
Anthony Wallace	X	X		X		X
Casey Kukoc	X	X	X	X	X	
Elliott Davis	X	X		X	X	X
Cody Haywood						X
Cheryl Staley	X	X		X	X	X
Jeremy Bogues	X	X		X	X	X
Abdul Scott	X	X		X	X	
Averre Jordan				X		X
Rheuben O'neal	X	X		X		X
Lisa Roberts	X	X			X	
Lebron Fisher	X	X	X	X	X	
John Curry	X	X			X	
Jason Barnes				X		X
Tyrone Korver				X	X	X
Mark Jackson	X	X				X
Total percentages:	73%	73%	13%	73%	60%	67%